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Matrix: a Journal for Matricultural Studies

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About *Matrix*

Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies (*Matrix*) is an open-access, peer-reviewed and refereed scholarly journal published by the International Network for Training, Education, and Research on Culture (Network on Culture), Canada. *Matrix* is published online twice yearly (Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer).

Matrix is a new journal in the humanities and social sciences, founded to provide an interdisciplinary forum for those who are working from the theoretical stance of matriculture as a Geertzian cultural system. Matriculture refers to the cultural system that brings together all cultural aspects informing the lives of mothers, usually women, of a given society, and by extension, the lives of women. Talking about matricultural systems allows us to consider as primary the cultural context of a given society as perceived, constructed, and lived by its women.

Similar to other cultural systems such as art, religion, or mathematics, employing the heuristic of matriculture allows for, among other things: cross-cultural comparisons; fresh insights into the social roles of women, men, otherwise identified, children, and the entire community of humans, animals, and the environment; and/or renewed understandings of historically mis-labelled cultures. With Guédon's work in mind, then, and based on Geertzian principles, the concept of matriculture is both a model *of* reality by rendering the structure of matricultures apprehensible and a model *for* reality, where psychological relationships are organized under its guidance.

We encourage submissions from scholars around the world who are ready to take a new look at the ways in which people - historically and currently - have organized meaningful relationships amongst themselves and with the natural environment, the myths, customs, and laws which support these relationships, and the ways in which researchers have documented and perhaps mis-labeled the matricultures they have encountered.

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Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies

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Introduction

(*English*)

MARIE-FRANÇOISE GUÉDON, PhD
with Linnéa Rowlatt, PhD, and Angela Sumegi, PhD

We would like to express our gratitude to Margaret Kress, PhD, and Idoia Arana-Beobide for the inspiration they provided with the theme for this issue: Mythmaking and Storytelling Among Matricultures.

When we take the cultural components of a society concerning women and motherhood, directly or indirectly, as a cultural system, that is to say the matricultural, it becomes evident that this system intrudes into every nook and cranny of the general cultural context or what we call culture, including its myths and its oral or written literature, its arts and its religion, and its entire worldview. As researchers, then, are we able to develop a better understanding of the vitality and orientations of the matricultural system in a given society by evaluating the presence and role of women in the myths conveyed by this society?

However, myths are neither simple nor monolithic. First, they present themselves in various ways and find many modes of expression, particularly in the arts, rituals, and, of course, religion; they are never explicit like science or history. They are not to be taken literally either and it is less the stories they tell than the way they tell them which is their essential gift. For Gregory Bateson, in his Introduction to *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*,

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myths offer foremost - and well beyond the adventures of the story they tell - a way of thinking by demonstrating the particular principles of thought in this or that society.

For example, according to anthropologist Edmund Leach's understanding of the perspective of Claude Lévi-Strauss, well known for his contributions to the study of myths and to structural anthropology, myths have as one of their functions not to explain or provide answers to the major questions that a society asks itself, but, rather, simply to propose these questions. In particular, the myths will neutralize contradictions at the heart of worldviews by making it possible to state these contradictions, to talk about them without having to resolve them, and to highlight them under the guise of metaphors and narratives which become justifications for the current state of the debate.

Myths and stories tell people how to think about their past and how to express their present, but in so doing they give those who listen to them tools to formulate new interpretations and re-interpretations. For instance, when the position of women and the play of kinship in which they are necessarily involved become ambiguous, the myth becomes the bearer of the questions which then arise. From myths and their derivatives, can we propose a matricultural hermeneutics that would examine the manner in which women's lives, with their perceptions of the world, of themselves, and of the way they are perceived by the rest of society, are organized and reorganized in a broader cultural context?

The answer to this question, however, is not obvious. In a simpler context, one could conceive of myths as founding texts that serve as general references and give clear guidance. But myth is never so simple. Even a formal and codified text like that of the biblical Ten Commandments has several versions, some with three or five commandments, sometimes ten or more, even up to seventeen. This is because, even in their written form, consecrated and frozen by elites and scribes who can control access, myths and their derivatives in artistic works, ritual acts, and religious discourses, among others, are not static. They exist to be told and retold, written and re-written, alluded to in conversation and song, and passed down from generation to generation, and despite the efforts made to keep them identical to themselves, they bear the mark of those who tell them.

Dennis and Barbara Tedlock, among other researchers, have also demonstrated that a myth is not just a text. It is, above all, an almost theatrical performance in which the audience is directly invited to participate personally and in the present.

To add to the complexity and ambiguity of the context, a myth always comes in several versions. The temptation to identify an original or complete version of a myth is part of scholarly research traditions, but it is a misdirection. Followed by most mythologists / anthropologists working on the subject, in *Structural Anthropology*, Claude Lévi-Strauss

demonstrated that a myth is multifaceted and takes place in all the versions to which one can have access, declining a set of relations, oppositions, and correspondences which make up and confirm the structure of the text. It is the same basic myth which we follow in all its transformations, but there are no original versions – only a multiplicity of stories in the making.

The structural approach to myth is disturbing because it embraces this multiplicity. It follows that myths, far from constituting simple explanatory models or primary references, are - on the contrary - changing, dynamic, and confusing. Even in their written forms, myths offer multiple interpretations and blur their metaphors. This is why the myths of the great religions, based as they are on written texts, always appeal to commentaries which will add an additional layer of ambiguity.

This does not mean that myths are not important; quite the opposite is true. While they enshrine ways of thinking and perceiving the world in its human, natural, invisible, or spiritual dimensions, they also justify our behaviour. We are able to see what myths hold true for people in the world today from their decisions and actions.

Oriented by great fundamental principles, even if these are often hidden in the unspoken, structured by references that cross borders, myths speak to us and they form an essential element of culture in general and the matricultural in particular. Myths are used to frame our ways of thinking and, therefore, our lives, but the framework is plural and does not often correspond to everyday life. It is available in several versions which do not often reflect the lived reality.

We know a large number of societies governed by more than one mythological system, including matrilineal societies, where, for example, several religious systems have been layered on top of each other through historical circumstances. For specific examples, we are thinking of the Berber people of North Africa, who had to adjust to Islam as brought by the Arabs, or the Tsimshian people on the Canadian Pacific coast, where Christianity was imposed without being able to replace the ancient matrilineal social structures. As general examples, where an aristocratic social class develops formal traditions while the common people prefer another version of the world or where men are organized into patrilineal lineages while women continue to live in matrilineal clans. There are bicultural and multicultural societies as much as bilingual or multilingual ones.

Indeed, like myths, it is cultural systems in general which become confused under the cover of order. As students of the cultural, despite our efforts to collect and present logical and normative cultural systems, from kinship to political authority, from religious to stylistic traditions, it is the cultural that presents itself less as a set of explicit norms and traits and more as a geographical map allowing for a multitude of routes, although always within a framework limited by the terms of reference. However, “(t)he map is not the

territory," said the semanticist Alfred Korzybski (founder of General Semantics); the words are not the things and we find ourselves circumscribed by the way we speak. We also forget that the terms *culture*, *matriculture*, or even *society*, are concepts or labels rather than solid realities. Nevertheless, our lived experience goes far beyond the cultural, even if the cultural is constructed in such a way that we could take it for the totality of reality, a reality that it presents to us as univocal, universal, and unequivocal. Even anthropology, the discipline closest to questions of culture, has had to take up metaphorical terms such as weaving, interbreeding, tinkering, symbiosis, or syncretism to approach perspectives on concrete societies that are better fitted to lived reality – even though our current societies, in their political and administrative expressions, are still looking for singular identities, closed nationalisms, and unilingual states.

Motivated and driven by the basic, concrete needs of their families, conscious of both the 'strangeness' of the Other, of its multiplicity, and of the passage of time, as Mary Catherine Bateson has shown, women - especially those who are responsible for the survival of their families - are perhaps more sensitive than other people to the potential mismatch between what the cultural context offers them and what really happens in their lives. The matricultural would then offer an occasional, momentary glimpse of the other side of the cultural, of the nameless.

The collection of texts and images assembled in this issue illustrates how the matricultural, as a cultural system (like the cultural in general), moves from one level to another, from one theme to another, from one anecdote to another. Moreover, this small but representative sample of various cultures confirms that in every cultural community, women do indeed face a changing multiplicity of definitions, norms, and relationships. Although they share a common theme, namely the engagement of the feminine in the mythological and associated fields such as art and ritual, these works, coming as they do from different cultural backgrounds, also illustrate different approaches which are conceived from various definitions of fundamental cultural concepts such as *woman*, *feminine*, *femininity*, and *motherhood*. But beyond cultural and methodological differences, whether scholarly and sophisticated in their data and analyses or stemming from a local popular discourse, whether they express personal experiences and points of view or whether they reiterate the political discourse of the state, this sample of testimonials represents the cultural in general and confirms a disturbing and often forgotten attribute of lived culture: the cultural is messy.

Our primary question, therefore, should not be about the possibility of learning anything about women in a given society from its myths. Rather, it should address the possibility of finding ways of thinking and speaking about that lived culture in all its disorder. And, first, to attempt to find and perceive the cultural as lived by women and mothers without going through the Cultural with a capital C, most often summarized, reified, and considered masculine by default. Then, to rediscover the possibility of considering several versions of

culture and the matricultural, not to find the most acceptable, the most interesting, or the one that has the most value, but to account for the resulting multiplicity.

Communities accessed by researchers often insist that the researcher report a watered-down version, correct in every sense of the word and approved by the elite. However, the cultural continues to exist for all members of society; it is not limited to the elite, nor to the wise or the *connaisseurs*. The juxtaposition of various versions of a myth can, moreover, make it possible to identify lineages or groups, each preserving its own version. It may also be that in some cultures the need to establish formal or generalized norms is overlooked. In her account of her experiences among the Mosuo people of southwestern China, 'Following Gemu: Journeys Around a Mosuo Goddess,' Tami Blumenfield highlights both the complexity of the cultural context and the multiplicity of versions of the founding myth which, while presenting notable differences, are nevertheless all recognized as valuable by the Mosuo community. The goddess Gemu is, it seems, part of a culture characterized by 'open and non-linear' thought, some of whose implications and benefits in a decentralized society Blumenfield describes.

The matricultural, including maternity as it does, is essential to every society, bearer as it is of the survival of the group; perhaps it is more multifaceted than other cultural systems, since it must adapt at all costs to changes in circumstances. In many cases, the matricultural is also explicitly linked to responsibility for cultural survival and, therefore, for the cultural heritage essential to the community's continuity. Under these conditions, one can understand why the matricultural is an early target of religious cultural systems of which the matricultural system is, at the same time, a visible expression, a guarantor, and a transmitter (even in its most negative or pathological forms). We could hypothesize that the matricultural, even more than other cultural systems and in order to fulfill its functions, must therefore participate in all the workings of society and take on a multiplicity of forms and expressions.

In many societies, often those with a dualistic worldview, the question of gender will join the cosmological realm and then the universe will find itself exemplifying, and therefore justifying, the distinction between the masculine and the feminine. The Han Chinese worldview is an example of this. Another example is provided by one of our collaborators: in a surprising turn towards the arboreal, Rejeanne Lacroix, in her piece ''It Takes All Kinds of Trees to Make a Forest:' Trees Associated with Feminine Folklore in the Eastern Slavic Folk Calendar,' explores the myths and stories of those trees deemed to be feminine by Eastern Slavs and their relationships with women. Nature becomes the model and justification for the relationship between the genders in Eastern Slavic societies. However, the presence of two genders (female and male) in cosmology and, therefore, mythology, does not mean an egalitarian relationship between the two sexes, since this relationship is often hierarchical in one way or another.

This multiplicity, together with the dynamism inherent in the matricultural, reinforces the complexity of the system and sometimes weakens the normative expressions of *feminine* and *motherhood* in societies. But neither multiplicity nor recognition of the matricultural are sufficient to provide alternatives for women struggling with miserable living conditions or oppressive norms. The complexity or even the opacity of the cultural system can generate a heavy social burden which translates at the level of the whole of society into a general cultural impoverishment when people have to navigate differently in this environment according to their experience, their social status, their social ties, and their degree of personal autonomy. On the other hand, this same complexity can become an essential factor for adaptation when change is imposed or inevitable. People then may have recourse to almost forgotten practices, to new interpretations of essentials, or to new ways of doing things rooted in enduring underlying principles.

According to Anthony Giddens, one essential form of power is the ability 'to make one's account count.' For instance, I may not have the choice to disobey a father's order, but I am able to claim the right to register my opposition to that order and to tell my own version of the story. The texts presented in this volume all relate accounts, sometimes personal, sometimes historical, sometimes political, which register that claim. With different modes of telling, retelling, or rewriting the stories that construct us, they bear witness to the power embedded in sharing testimonials.

Consequentially, when the dominant group, whether defined by caste, gender, social class, or other, neglects and eventually no longer perceives those subordinate, who - in their eyes - do not count, this blindness can allow the subordinate group(s) to keep intact their version of myths, stories, history, and worldview, and to maintain or develop their own values in relative invisibility (for example, the case of Korean women’s shamanism). When these groups manage to survive, they sustain cultural continuity and identity for their entire community. This is how the great religious myths, in their written and official versions, often cohabit with popular versions, often oral, which develop away from the elites.

In 'The Wish of the Mother: Re-writing Desire into Sacred Narratives in *Yaśodharāvata* and the *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*,' Phusathi Liyanaarachchi explores conflicting versions of texts alluding to motherhood in relation to the advent of Buddhism. She questions the role of Māyā, the mother of the Buddha, in the classical versions, and notes that her death in childbirth, a precondition for Siddhartha's Enlightenment, accompanies a rejection of mothers from the Buddhist canon. Alongside these great classical texts where motherhood is sidelined, Liyanaarachchi introduces us to poetic cycles of Sinhalese folklore which reframe the canonical narratives by centering on Māyā's stated wishes, thereby emphasizing the importance of the maternal. This then enables the figure of Māyā to resist the erasure and the submersion of mothers in written textual traditions.

Since each human society has had to develop a form of matriculture, the matricultural is more or less visible, more or less shared than its male counterpart, and more or less well-transmitted across the generations. Indeed, each of our contributors approaches the matricultural from some different chosen element, each time retracing its evolution, loss, or transformation. Heide Goettner-Abendroth, for example, searches for patterns of the prehistoric divine feminine and her partner, the sacred king or *heros*, in international fairy tales. With these, she illustrates the erosion of once flourishing matricultural systems as the societies that housed them were overcome by patriarchal societies. The myth becomes folklore and yields to the pressures of the victors and, yet, the tales endure.

Reconstructing a historical space closer to us, Patrick Jung's study ‘Traces of the Feminine: Matriculture in the Traditional Ho-Chunk Life World’ outlines the resilience of the matricultural system among the Ho-Chunk, a Siouan language-speaking Indigenous people of North America. His work shows that while the Ho-Chunk developed a patrilineal kinship system in the seventeenth century that would replace the ancient matrilineal system (in order to better adapt themselves to the new economic and political context established by the European colonizers), many components of the ancient matriculture would survive to the present day. Supported by oral traditions, these are especially to be found in a strongly feminine cosmology, an occasional bilinear kinship system, and strong avuncular kinship ties.

The matriculture of a society is not always replaced by that of newcomers, and the coexistence of systems of thought or cultural systems from different periods or brought by distinct groups is no longer in question. This is the perspective developed by Arantzazu Saratxaga Arregi in 'The Matrixiality of the Earth in the Basque Worldview.' Here again, we are witnessing the re-creation - if not the re-invention - of mythology. In the case of the Basques, this process unfolds from ancient concepts which pre-date the arrival of Indo-European speaking peoples; these can still be accessed by means of a re-signification of symbolic expressions of Basque matriculture and by their enduring meanings in the context of a Basque worldview.

With similar results but on another scale and following a different process, one of negotiation and creativity, Etim Ekpenyoung Mfon, in his article 'The Influence of Christian Religion on the Rite of Passage of Ikwe-ezi in Mgbidi of Imo State, Nigeria,' examines the juxtaposition of African Christianity and pre-Christian customs in the traditional rite-of-passage for puberty-aged girls among the Mgbidi people of southwestern Nigeria. What colonizers desired to be the replacement of the Indigenous ritual with a Christian feast was not a smooth process, but negotiations allowed traditionalists to highlight, beyond the ritual details and individual and family interests, the underlying and essential question about the well-being of the community. The fertility of the land (and, therefore, the survival of the villages) was and is considered to be in intimate relationship with the purity and morality of the girls, qualities which the traditional rituals guaranteed. Once the

essential link between the girls and the land had been accepted by the Christians, by preserving the symbols it was possible to develop a compromise which allowed the rituals to continue, although in new ways. Further, to adapt not only to the presence of Christianity, but also to a society in the process of urbanization and emigration, illustrated here by images which reveal the vitality of a tradition that adapts.

Along with the questions and issues raised by academic research, the poetic texts and paintings included in this issue bring us to another level of discourse. As Edward Sapir liked to remind us, the cultural only exists in the minds of the people who experience it, or in the summaries of observers, whether local people or visitors; there is no culture without an individual to think it. Similarly, the matricultural will find its most convincing expressions in the people who live them and who testify to it, of whatever gender. Here is where we witness culture in the making and where matriculture reveals itself as a process and a relationship, and certainly not a collection of items, information, or even symbols. The process is a life-generating one of creativity, of connection, and of sharing – and it takes place at the individual level. All cultural systems are engaged in this same process.

In ‘Mosuo Love: An Eight-Poem Collection,’ the love songs composed by Banamu, an artist who belongs to a Mosuo matrilineage in southwestern China, are offered to us as testimonies of a personal journey intertwined or woven with cultural resources gleaned over the course of a lifetime framed by a matrilineal, quasi-matriarchal system experienced and assumed by the men and women of her society. These songs are a passionate plea for the quality of a cultivated life and give us a sense of the vitality that animates a society where women can openly sing about their individual freedom.

Yang Lifen, from the same Mosuo ethnic group in China, carried by the same matrilineal society and the same freedom, tells us in ‘Mosuo Songs and Dances: From the Villages to the University Campus’ how she took responsibility for preserving the Mosuo songs that she collected, transcribed, and adapted to the modern – if not international - world. Her work is much more than a collection of songs resulting from a collection of folk documents; this carefully documented personal quest led her to bring together childhood village life and academia, Mosuo oral literature and European classical music, and family rituals and state-organized performances, transforming them in order to better preserve the symbolic and artistic expressions of her Mosuo community. The results are an explosive affirmation of her personal and cultural identity, demonstrating forcefully that a strong cultural context enriches itself during contact with others, rather than losing its roots.

Margaret Kress comes from a hybrid society where the juxtaposition of various cultural heritages has become an explicit part of the cultural fabric. As a Métis person in Canada, a culture born from multiple encounters between the Algonquian-speaking tribes of central Canada (including the Cree peoples) and the European fur-traders, Kress describes herself

as a Michif woman ‘who honours her Michif, French, English, and German ancestors.’ Her account, poem, and painting all revolve around the shared mythological being of the Rougarou, himself a composite trickster uniting such distant figures as the French Loup Garou and the Cree Windigo, the antithesis of a human being. However, in the human beings he encounters, the Rougarou brings out the potential for the eminently human quality of compassion.

Moreover, seen from the outside, Michif society shares with its Indigenous neighbours a characteristic that sets it apart from the dominant Canadian society: these Métis and Indigenous societies usually have not yet professionalized their artists and cultural contributors. Even though the role of Elders and political leaders is increasingly formal, everyone in the community is invited to participate in the creative life of the group, can contribute a song, a poem, an embroidery or beadwork design. Experience and competence are recognized but do not coalesce into monopolies of creativity. The egalitarian ethos that was brought by the people of Alonquian language families penetrates the whole matricultural system, at the same time as the old recognition of genders other than masculine and feminine gives it a particular fluidity. The last is embodied in the semi-mythical figure of Roogarou, who can change shape and gender, sometimes monstrous, sometimes almost human, bordering on the visible and the invisible. In her personal account of her engagement with her cultural identity, Kress demonstrates that the socio-cultural human context of any society is not to be assumed. It requires the active participation of members of that society and the matricultural system is no exception.

Coming from a different society and another continent, bearing the marks of a patriarchal past and the influence of writing as the dominant medium of communication, Robert DiNapoli is similarly personally engaged in retracing the roots of his cultural world as a scholar, but also, therefore, as a member of his learned community. In his personal reflections on the theme of mythmaking and matriculture, entitled ‘Who Saw Her First? The Tangled Sight-Lines of Medieval Romance and Marian Piety,’ he is bridging elements from the Middle Ages with later interpretations and present-day consequences revolving around a key figure of the Western European matriculture, the Blessed Virgin Mary. His reflections exemplify one essential process in the creation and maintenance of a matricultural context: remembrance. Whether by telling and retelling myths, stories, or anecdotes, whether by inscribing texts on stone, clay, or paper, whether by staging them in dance, theatre, or ritual, whether by combing archives and interpreting images, a matricultural system has to be remembered. The myths and their expressions play a key role in bringing old elements to the surface and preserving enduring modes of thinking.

Matricultural systems are neither born nor maintained exclusively by and for women. They result from the actions and choices made by the whole society, including its male members. A rich, vibrant, and supportive matricultural system needs more than people; it

demands the attention and care of those who are able to renew it generation after generation, those who can transmit it and find new modes of expression, as well as those who allow themselves to resist, transform, and adapt it, or openly transgress its norms, and those who enthusiastically embark on a quest to trace and retell its most important myths.

May 2023
Ste-Étienne-de-Bolton

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Introduction

(*français*)

MARIE-FRANÇOISE GUÉDON, PhD
avec Linnéa Rowlatt, PhD, et Angela Sumegi, PhD

Nous voudrions exprimer notre gratitude à Margaret Kress, PhD, et Idoia Arana-Beobide pour l'inspiration qu'elles ont fournie avec le thème de ce numéro : Mythes et contes parmi les matricultures.

Quand on prend les composantes culturelles d'une société concernant directement ou indirectement les femmes et la maternité comme un système culturel – appelons ce système le matriculturel – on s'aperçoit que ce système s'immisce dans tous les coins et recoins du contexte culturel general, ce que nous appelons la culture - y compris ses mythes et sa littérature orale ou écrite, ses arts et son religieux, et toute sa vision du monde. En tant que chercheurs, pourrions-nous alors développer une meilleure compréhension de la vitalité et des orientations du système matriculturel dans une société donnée en évaluant la présence et le rôle des femmes dans les mythes véhiculés par cette société?

Mais les mythes ne sont ni simples ni monolithiques. D'abord, ils se présentent sous des modalités variées et trouvent de nombreux modes d'expression, en particulier dans les arts, les rituels, et bien sûr le religieux. Ensuite les mythes ne sont jamais explicites comme la science ou l'histoire. Ils ne sont pas non plus à prendre au pied de la lettre et c'est moins les histoires qu'ils racontent que la façon dont il les racontent qui composent

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l’essentiel de ce qu’ils ont à offrir. Pour Gregory Bateson, dans son Introduction à *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, les mythes offrent d’abord, et bien au delà des péripéties de l’histoire qu’ils racontent, une façon de penser, en démontrant les principes particuliers à la pensée telle ou telle société.

Par exemple, selon l’anthropologue Edmund Leach, dans la perspective de l’anthropologue Claude Lévi-Strauss, bien connu pour ses contributions à l’étude des mythes et à l’anthropologue structurale, les mythes ont pour l’une de leurs fonctions non pas d’expliquer ou d’apporter des réponses aux grandes questions que se pose une société mais plutôt de proposer ces questions plutôt que d’autres. En particulier, ils vont neutraliser les contradictions au cœur des visions du monde, en permettant de dire ces contradictions, d’en parler sans avoir à les résoudre, et de les mettre en évidence sous le couvert de métaphores et de narratifs qui deviennent des justifications pour l’état actuel du débat.

Les mythes et les histoires disent aux gens comment penser leur passé et exprimer leur présent, mais ce faisant ils donnent à ceux qui les écoutent des outils pour formuler des interprétations et ré-interprétations nouvelles. Lorsque la position des femmes et le jeu de la parenté auquel elles sont nécessairement mèlées se font ambigus, le mythe se fait porteur des questions qui naissent alors. À partir des mythes et de leurs dérivés, peut-on proposer une herméneutique matriculturelle qui examinerait comment la vie des femmes, leur perception du monde et d’elles-mêmes, et la façon dont elles sont perçues par le reste reste de la société, s’organisent et se réorganisent dans un contexte culturel élargi?

Mais la réponse à cette question n’est pas évidente. Dans un contexte plus simple, on pourrait concevoir les mythes comme des textes fondateurs qui servent de référence générale et donnent des directives claires. Mais le mythe n’est jamais aussi simple. Même un texte formel et codifié comme celui des dix commandements bibliques présente plusieurs versions avec, parfois, trois ou cinq et jusqu’à dix-sept commandments. De plus, même dans leur forme écrite, consacrée et figée par les élites et les scribes qui peuvent en contrôler l’accès, les mythes et leurs dérivés dans les œuvres artistiques, les actes rituelles, et les discours religieux, entre autre, ne sont pas statiques. Ils existent pour être dits et redits, écrits et ré-écrits, et transmis d’une génération à l’autre, et en dépit des efforts déployés pour les conserver identiques à eux-mêmes, ils portent la marque de ceux et celles qui les racontent.

Dennis et Barbara Tedlock, entre autres chercheurs, ont par ailleurs démontrées qu’un mythe n’est pas seulement un texte. C’est avant tout une performance quasi théâtrale où l’audience est directement invitée à participer personnellement et au présent.

Pour ajouter à la complexité et à l'ambiguité du contexte, un mythe a toujours plusieurs versions. La tentation d'identifier une version originelle ou complète d'un mythe fait partie des traditions de recherche savantes, mais il s'agit là d'une fausse route. Suivi par la plupart des mythologues / anthropologues travaillant sur les mythes, Claude Lévi-Strauss a démontré qu'un mythe est multiforme et se déroule sur toutes les versions auxquelles on peut avoir accès, déclinant un jeu de relations, oppositions, et correspondances qui composent et confirment la structure du texte. C'est le même mythe de base, que l'on suit dans toute ses transformations, mais il n'existe pas de versions originelle, seulement une multiplicité de récits en devenir.

L'approche structurale du mythe dérange parce qu'elle embrasse cette multiplicité. Il s'ensuit que les mythes, loin de constituter des modèles explicatifs simples, des référence primaires, sont au contraire changeant, dynamiques, et confus. Même dans leurs formes écrites, les mythes offrent de multiples interprétations et brouillent leurs métaphores. C'est pourquoi les mythes des grands religions basées sur des textes écrits font toujours appel aux commentaires qui vont ajouter une couche supplémentaire d'exégèse.

Cela ne veut pas dire que les mythes ne sont pas important, au contraire. S'ils consacrent des façons de penser et de percevoir le monde, dans ses dimensions humaines, naturelles, invisibles ou spirituelles, ils justifient également nos façons de d'agir. Nous sommes en mesure de voir quels mythes sont vrais pour les gens dans le monde d'aujourd'hui à partir de leurs actions.

Orientés par de grands principes fondamentaux, même si ceux-ci sont souvent dissimulés dans les non-dits, structurés par des références qui traversent le temps et les frontières, les mythes nous parlent et ils forment un élément essentiel du culturel en général et du matriculturel en particulier. Ils sont utilisés pour encadrer nos façons de penser et donc nos vies, mais le cadre est pluriel et ne correspond pas souvent la vie quotidienne. Il se décline en plusieurs versions qui ne reflètent pas nécessairement la réalité vécue.

Nous connaissons un grand nombre de sociétés régies par plus d'une système mythologique, y compris des sociétés matrilinéaires, quand par exemples plusieurs systèmes religieux se sont juxtaposés les uns sur les autres au cours de l'histoire. Pour des exemples concrets, les Berbères en Afrique du nord, qui on dû composer avec l'Islam apporter par les Arabes, ou les Tsimshian sur la Côte du Pacifique canadien, où le Christianisme s'est imposé sans pouvoir remplacer les anciennes structures sociales matrilinéaires. Pour des exemples généraux, quand une classe sociale aristocratique développe des traditions formelles alors que les gens du communs préfère une autre versions du monde, ou encore quand les hommes sont organisé en lignages patrilinéaires alors que les femmes continuent à vivre en clans matrilinéaires. Il existe des sociétés bilingues ou multilingues et des sociétés pluri-culturelles.

En effet, comme des mythes, ce sont tous les systèmes culturels qui s'embrouillent sous un couvert ordonné. En tant qu'étudiants de la chose culturelle, en dépit de nos efforts pour recueillir et présenter des systèmes culturels logiques et normatifs, de la parenté à l'autorité politique, du religieux aux traditions stylistiques, c'est tout le culturel qui se présente moins comme un ensemble de normes et de traits explicites, que comme une carte géographique permettant une multitude de trajets. Mais "La carte n'est pas le territoire," disait le sémanticiste Alfred Korzybski; les mots ne sont pas les choses et nous nous retrouvons construits par nos façons de parler. Nous oublions par ailleurs que les termes de *culture*, *matriculture*, ou même de *société* sont des concepts ou des etiquettes plutôt que des réalités solides. Pourtant le vécu dépasse de loin le culturel, même si le culturel est construit de façon à ce qu'on le prenne pour la totalité de la réalité, une réalité qu'il nous présente comme univoque, universelle, et sans équivoque. Même l'anthropologie, la discipline la plus proche des questions de culture, a dû reprendre des notions comme tissage et métissage, bricolage, symbiose, ou syncrétisme, pour s'approcher de perspectives plus proches du vécu des sociétés concrètes - même si nos sociétés actuelles, dans leurs expressions administratives, religieuses, politiques et administratives cherchent encore des identités au singulier, des nationalismes fermés et des pays unilingues.

Animées et conduites par les besoins fondamentaux et concrets de leurs familles, conscientes à la fois de 'l'étrangeté' de l'autre, de sa multiplicité, et du passage du temps, comme l'a montré Mary Catherine Bateson, se pourrait-il que les femmes, et en particulier celles qui sont responsables de la survie de leurs familles, soient plus sensibles que les autres personnes au décalage potentiel entre ce que leur offre le contexte culturel, et ce qui se passe 'dans la vraie vie?' Le matriculturel offrirait alors parfois un coup d'oeil momentané sur l'autre côté du culturel, sur l'innommé.

La collection de textes et d'images rassemblée dans ce numéro illustre la façon dont le matriculturel en tant que système culturel, comme le culturel en général, passe d'un niveau à l'autre, d'un thème à l'autre, d'une anecdote à l'autre. De plus, cet échantillon restreint mais représentatif de cultures variés confirme que dans chaque communauté culturelle, les femmes sont en effet confrontées à une multiplicité changeante de définitions, de normes, et de relations. Bien qu'elles partagent un thème commun, soit l'engagement du féminin dans le mythologique et les domaines associés comme l'art et le rituel, ces prestations, venues de milieux culturels différents, illustrent aussi des approches différentes, conçues à partir de définitions variées de notions fondamentales comme *la femme*, *le féminin*, *la féminité*, et *la maternité*. Mais au delà des différences culturelles et méthodologiques, qu'elles soient savantes et sophistiquées dans leurs données et leurs analyses, ou bien issues d'un discours populaire local, qu'elles expriment des expériences et points de vue personnels ou qu'elles réitèrent le discours politique de

l'état, cet échantillon de témoignages représente le culturel en général et confirme un attribut troublant et souvent oublié de la culture vécue : La culture est désordonnée.

Notre question originelle ne devrait donc pas porter sur la possibilité d'apprendre quelque chose sur les femmes dans une société donnée à partir de ses mythes; elle devrait plutôt s'addresser à la possibilité de trouver des façons de penser et de dire la culture vécue, dans son désordre. Et d'abord, de tenter de percevoir le culturel vécu par les femmes et les mères sans passer par le Culturel avec un C majuscule le plus souvent résumé, réifié, et considéré, par défaut, masculin. Ensuite, retrouver la possibilité de considérer plusieurs versions de la culture et du matriculturel, non pour trouver la plus acceptable, la plus intéressante ou celle qui a le plus de valeur, mais pour tenir compte de la résultante d'une multiplicité.

Les communautés rejointes par les chercheurs insistent souvent pour que les chercheurs témoignent d'une version édulcoré, correcte dans tous les sens du terme, et approuvée par l'élite. Mais le culturel reste le fait de tous les membres de la société; il ne se limite ni à l'élite, ni aux sages, ni aux connaisseurs. La juxtaposition de ses diverses versions peut parfois permettre d'identifier les lignages ou les groupes, chacun préservant sa propre version. Il se peut aussi que dans certaines cultures, on mette de côté le besoin d'établir des normes formelles ou généralisées. Par example, dans son étude chez les Mosuo, dans le sud-ouest chinois, "Following Gemu: Journeys Around a Mosuo Goddess," Tami Blumenfield met en évidence et la complexité du culturel, et la multiplicité des versions du mythe fondateur qui tout en présentant des différences notables sont néanmoins toutes reconnues comme ayant de la valeur par la communauté Mosuo. La déesse Gemu fait partie d'un contexte caractérisé par une pensé 'ouverte et non-linéaire,' dont Blumenfield décrit certaines des implications et des avantages dans une société décentralisée.

Le matriculturel, essentiel à chaque société, porteur comme il l'est de la survie du groupe, est peut-être plus multiforme que les autres systèmes culturels puisqu'il doit s'adapter coûte que coûte aux changements de circonstances. Dans de nombreux cas, la matriculturel est d'ailleurs explicitement lié à la responsabilité de la survie culturelle de la communauté et donc de l'héritage culturel indispensable à sa continuité. Dans ces conditions, on peut comprendre pourquoi il est une première cible des systèmes religieux dont il est à la fois une expression visible, un garant, et un transmetteur, même dans ses formes les plus négatives ou pathologiques. On pourrait peut-être poser l'hypothèse que le matriculturel, plus encore que les autres systèmes culturels, et pour répondre à ses fonctions va devoir participer à tous les rouages de la société, et prendre une multiplicité de formes et d'expressions.

Dans nombre de sociétés, souvent dualistes dans leur vision du monde, la question du genre va rejoindre le cosmological et c'est l'univers tout entier qui va se retrouver exemplifier, et donc justifier, la distinction entre le masculin et le féminin. La vision du monde des Chinois Han en est un exemple. Un autre exemple est apporté par l'une de nos collaboratrices : Dans un surprenant virage vers l'arboricole, Réjeanne Lacroix, dans son article ''It Takes All Kinds of Trees to Make a Forest' : Trees Associated with Feminine Folklore in the Eastern Slavic Folk Calendar,' explore les mythes et les histoires de ces arbres réputés être féminin par les Slaves orientaux, et leurs relations avec les femmes. La présence des deux genres masculin et féminin dans la cosmologie, et donc la mythologie ne signifie par pour autant une relation égalitaire entre les deux sexes, puisque cette relation est souvent hiérarchisée d'une manière ou d'une autre.

Si cette multiplicité jointe au dynamisme inhérent au matriculturel renforce la complexité du système et affaiblit parfois les expressions normative du féminin et de la maternité dans la plupart des sociétés, elle n'apporte pas nécessairement des alternatives pour les femmes aux prises avec des conditions de vie misérables ou des normes oppressantes. La complexité ou encore l'opacité du système peut générer un lourd fardeau social qui se traduit au niveau de toute la société par un appauvrissement culturel général lorsque les gens doivent naviguer différemment dans cet environnement selon leur expérience, leur statut social, leurs liens sociaux et leur degré d'autonomie personnelle. D'autre part, cette même complexité peut devenir un facteur essentiel pour l'adaptation quand le changement est imposé ou inévitable; on peut alors avoir recours à des pratiques quasiment oubliées ou des nouvelles interprétations de ce qui est essentiel, ou à de nouvelles façon de faire enracinées dans des principes restés sous-jacents.

Selon Anthony Giddens, une forme essentielle de pouvoir est la capacité « de faire en sorte que son compte-rendu soit pris en compte. » Par exemple, je n'ai peut-être pas le choix de désobéir à l'ordre d'un père, mais je peux revendiquer le droit d'enregistrer mon opposition à cet ordre et de raconter ma propre version de l'histoire. Les textes présentés dans ce volume relatent tous des récits, tantôt personnels, tantôt historiques, tantôt politiques, qui enregistrent une revendication. Avec diverses manières de raconter, de redire ou de réécrire les histoires qui nous construisent, ils démontrent le pouvoir inhérent au partage des témoignages.

Conséquemment, lorsque le groupe dominant (caste, genre, classe sociale, ou autre) néglige et finit par ne plus percevoir ceux qui à ses yeux ne comptent pas, cet aveuglement peut permettre à ces derniers de conserver leur version des choses, conserver ou développer leurs propre valeurs dans une invisibilité relative (comme, par exemple, les pratiques chamaniques des femmes coréennes). Mais lorsque ces groupes réussissent à survivre, ils arrivent à soutenir une continuité culturelle et identitaire pour toute leur communauté. C'est ainsi que les grands mythes religieux, dans leurs versions

écrites et officielles vont souvent cohabiter avec des versions populaires, souvent orales, qui se développent et se maintiennent à l'écart des élites.

Dans 'The Wish of the Mother: Re-writing Desire into Sacred Narratives in *Yaśodharāvata* and the *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*,' Phusathi Liyanaarachchi explore des versions contradictoires des textes faisant allusion à la maternité en relation avec l'avènement du Bouddhisme. Elle interroge le rôle de Māyā, la mère du Bouddha, dans les versions classiques et note que sa mort en couche, une pré-condition pour l'Illumination de Siddhartha, va de pair avec le rejet des mères hors du canon bouddhiste. À côté des grands textes classiques, où la maternité est mise à l'écart, Liyanaarachchi nous introduit aux cycles poétiques du folklore Sinhalais qui ré-encadrent les récits canoniques en se centrant sur les désirs ou voeux de Māyā, ce faisant mettant l'emphase sur l'importance du vœu maternel, ce qui permet alors à la figure de Māyā de résister à l'effacement et à la submersion des mères dans les traditions textuelles écrites.

Si chaque société humaine a dû développer un forme de matriculture, le matriculturel est plus ou moins visible, plus ou moins partagé avec son homologue masculin, plus ou moins bien transmis. En effet, chacun de nos contributeurs et contributrices aborde le matriculturel à partir de quelque élément choisi différent, mais chaque fois en retraçant son évolution, sa perte ou sa transformation. Heide Goettner-Abendroth, par exemple, recherche les schémas du divin féminin préhistorique et de son partenaire, le roi sacré ou *héros*, dans les contes de fée du monde, à l'aide desquels elle illustre l'érosion des systèmes matriculturels autrefois florissants, alors que les sociétés qui les abritaient étaient vaincues et conquises par des sociétés patriarcales. Le mythe devient folklore et cède aux pressions des vainqueurs. Mais les contes demeurent.

Réconstruisant un éspace historique plus proche de nous, dans 'Traces of the Feminine: Matriculture in the Traditional Ho-Chunk Life World' Patrick Jung suit les traces de la résilience du matriculturel chez un peuple autochtone d'Amérique du Nord, les Ho-Chunk, de langue siouanne. L'étude démontre que pendant que le peuple Ho-Chunk développaient au dix-septième siècle, et pour mieux s'adapter aux nouveaux contextes économiques et politiques mis en place par les colonisateurs européens, un système de parenté patrilinéaire qui allait remplacer l'ancient système matrilinéaire, plusieurs composantes du matriculturel ancien, soutenues par les traditions orales, allaient survivre jusqu'à nos jour, incluant une cosmologie fortement imbue du féminin, un système de parenté occasionnellement bilinéaire, et le renforcement des liens de parenté avunculaires.

Le matriculturel d'une société n'est pas toujours remplacé par celui des nouveau-venus. La co-existence de systèmes de pensée ou de systèmes culturels issus de diverse époques ou apportées par des groupes distincts n'est plus en question. C'est la perspective

développée par Arantzasu Saratxaga dans 'The Matrixiality of the Earth in the Basque Worldview.' Ici encore, nous assistons à la re-création sinon la ré-invention de la mythologie. Dans le cas des basque, ce processus se déroule à partir de concepts anciens qui pré-dateraient l'arrivée des peuples de langues Indo-Européennes au moyen de la re-assignation d'expressions symboliques de la matriculture basque et de leurs significations dans le contexte d'une vision basque du monde.

Avec des résultats semblables mais sur une autre échelle et suivant un processus différent, de négociation et de créativité, Etim Ekpenyong Mfon, dans 'The Influence of Christian Religion on the Rite of Passage of Ikwe-ezi in Mgbidi of Imo State, Nigeria,' examine la juxtaposition du Christianisme et des coutumes pré-chrétienne dans le cas des rites de passage traditionels du peuple Mgbidi du Sud-Ouest du Nigéria concernant le ritual d'initiation des jeunes filles au moment de leur puberté. Ce qui pour certains devait être une transition imposée pour supprimer le rituel autochtone par un fête chrétienne s'annonçait douloureux, mais les négociations ont permis aux traditionalistes de mettre en évidence, au delà des détails rituels et des intérêts individuels et familiaux, la question sous-jacente et essentielle du bien-être de la communauté. Ce bien-être est considéré comme dépendant de la fécondité et de la moralité des jeunes filles, qualités que garantissent les rituels traditionnels. Une fois établis les liens essentiels, au départ implicites, entre la pureté des filles et la fertilité de la terre (et donc la survie des villages), il devint évident que les rituels devaient continuer, d'une façon ou d'une autre, même au prix de profondes transformations. Et on a pu développer les moyens de continuer les rituels et de les adapter non seulement à la présence du christianisme, mais aussi à une société en voie d'urbanisation, en conservant les symboles, illustrés ici par des images qui démontrent la vitalité d'une tradition qui s'adapte.

Lorsque nous sortons du cadre de la recherche universitaire pour aborder les expressions artistiques et les témoignages personnels, nous touchons un autre niveau de discourse. Comme aimait le rappeler Edward Sapir, le culturel n'existe que dans l'esprit des personnes qui le vivent, ou dans les synthèses des observateurs, qu'il s'agisse de personnes locales ou de visiteurs; il n'ya pas de culturel sans individu pour le penser. De même le matriculturel va trouver ses expressions les plus probantes dans les personnes qui les vivent et en témoignent, de quelque genre qu'elles soient. Ici, nous assistons au culturel en train de se faire, là où la culture se révèle comme processus et relation, et certainement pas comme une collections d'éléments, d'information, ou même de symboles. Le culturel comme processus en est un de créativité, de connectivité, et de partage, et il se passe au niveau individuel. Tous les systèmes culturels sont engagés dans ce même processus.

Dans 'Mosuo Love : An Eight-Poem Collection,' les chants d'amour composés par Banamu, une artiste qui appartient à un matrilignage Mosuo dans le sud-ouest de la chine, nous

sont offerts comme témoignages d'un parcours personnel entremélé ou entretissé de ressources culturelles glanées au fil d'une vie encadrée par un système matrilinaire, quasi-matriarchal, vécu et assumé par la société, hommes et femmes. Ces poèmes sont un pladoyer passioné pour la qualité d'une vie 'cultivée,' et nous donnent une idée de la vitalité qui anime une société où les femmes peuvent chanter ouvertement leur liberté individuelle.

Yang Lifen, du même groupe ethnique mosuo en Chine, portée par la même société matrilinéaire et la même liberté, nous raconte comment elle a pris la responsabilité de préserver les chants mosuo qu'elle a collectés, transcrits, et adaptés au monde moderne, sinon international. Son travail est beaucoup plus qu'une collection de chants résultant d'une collecte de document folkloriques; sa quête personnelle, soigneusement documentée, l'a amenée à réunir la vie du village de son enfance et le milieu universitaire, la littérature orale mosuo et la musique classique européenne, les rituels familiaux et les spectacles organisés par l'état, transformant pour mieux les préserver les expressions symboliques et artistiques de sa communauté mosuo. Elle aboutit à une affirmation explosive de son identité personnelle et culturelle, démontrant du même coup qu'un contexte culturel peut s'enricher au contact de l'autre s'il est assez fort, même s'il est par ailleurs menacé de perdre sa langue et sa terre.

Margaret Kress vient d'une société hybride où la juxtaposition d'héritages culturels variés est devenue un élément explicite de la fabrique culturelle. En tant que personne métis au Canada, héritière de multiple rencontres entre les peuples de langues algonquienes du Canada central (incluant les peuples cris) et les Européens impliqués dans la traite des fourrures, elle se décrit elle-même comme une femme michif 'qui honore ses ancêtres michif, français, anglais, et allemand.' Son récit, son poème et sa peinture tournent tous autour de l'être mythologique du Rougarou, lui-même un figure composite réunissant des personnages aussi éloignés que le Loup Garou français et le Windigo cri, antithèse d'un être humain. Cependant, chez les êtres humains qu'il rencontre, le Rougarou fait ressortir le potentiel de la qualité éminemment humaine de la compassion.

Par ailleurs, vue de l'extérieur, la société michif partage avec ses voisins indigènes un trait qui les sépare de la société dominante : ces sociétés métisses et autochtones n'ont généralement pas encore professionnalisé leurs artistes et leurs contributeurs culturels. Même si les rôles d'ainés et la position des chefs politique deviennent de plus en plus formels, chacun dans la communauté est invité a participer à la vie créative du groupe, peut contribuer un chant, un poème, un motif de broderie ou de perlage. L'experience et la compétence sont reconnues, mais nul n'a le monopole de la création. L'éthos égalitaire qui fut apporté par les gens de langues alonquiennes pénètre tout le système matriculturel, en même temps qu l'ancienne reconnaissance de genres autre que le masculin et féminin lui donnent une fluidité particulière. Ce derniere est incarnée dans la

figure semi-mythique de Roogarou, qui peut changer de forme et de genre, tantôt monstrueux, tantôt presque humain, à la marge de visible et de l'invisible. Kress démontre, dans son témoignage et son engagement avec son identité culturelle, que le contexte socio-culturel human ne se maintient pas de lui-même. Il requiert la participations active des membres de la société pour survivre, et le système matriculturel ne fait pas exception à la règle.

Issu d'une autre société et d'un autre continent, portant la marque d'une passé patriarcal et l'influence de l'écriture comme medium dominant de communication, Robert DiNapoli est pourtant pareillement engagé dans une quête sur les traces d'une figure-clé de sa culture européenne occidentale : la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie. En tant qu'intellectuel, historien, et membre d'une communauté savante, mais aussi en tant que personne impliquée dans sa propre culture, il nous livre ses réflexions sur une recherche qui tente de faire le lien entre la figure mariale du Moyen age et celles de la Renaissance, éclairant ce faisant une période durant laquelle la notion d'amour courtois a transformé les relation d'un système matriculturel viable. Il souligne ainsi le rôle essentiel de la mémoire. Qu'on la maintienne en disant et redisant les histoires, petites histoires, ou grands cycles mythologiques, qu'on inscrive des tablettes de pierre, d'argile, ou de papier, qu'on la danse ou qu'on la mette en scène au théatre, ou au temple, qu'on en fasse des berceuses, ou qu'on la retrouve au cours des sentiers, ou encore qu'on la préserve dans des archives, il faut se souvenir des systèmes culturels : c'est à cette condition qu'on pourra être conscient de leur influence. Les mythes et leurs expressions jouent un rôle clé en faisant remonter à la surface des éléments anciens et en préservant des modes de pensée durables.

Les systèmes matriculturels ne sont pas formés ou maintenus exclusivement par et pour les femmes. Ils naissent des actions et des choix faits par toute la société, y compris les hommes. Un système matriculturel riche, vibrant, et influent demande plus que des gens qui l'acceptent et le maintiennent. Il nécessite l'attention et les soins de ceux et celles qui sont capables de le renouveler, génération après génération, de ceux qui trouvent de nouveaux modes d'expressions et de transmissions, ceux qui défendent ses valeurs, mais aussi ceux qui se permettent de résister, de les transformer, et de l'adapter, ou de transgresser ouvertement ses normes, et ceux qui se lancent avec enthousiasme dans une quête pour retracer et redire ses mythes les plus importants.

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Ste-Étienne-de-Bolton

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Following Gemu: Journeys Around a Mosuo Goddess

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Abstract

This article considers how animist deities can be foregrounded as sentient central characters in ethnographic research, following recent calls to try looking through non-human perspectives as we consider socio-ecological zones from different angles. Drawing on eighteen years of ethnographic engagement in a mountainous region of southwest China where Na / Mosuo people worship the goddess Gemu, I layer together numerous narratives about the goddess and her mountain while also including what may be imagined as her own point of view. I juxtapose voices of Na people from different communities and at different points in time, visitors from distant regions keen on gaining a closer impression of a goddess-worshipping culture, and the anthropologist-author for this polyvocal examination and exploration. The transformation of the goddess from core deity of Na people into a phenomenon transcending their home areas reveals complex interactions between long-term inhabitants, animist practice, tourist discourse, government policy, and heritage recognition and preservation efforts.

Keywords: Na / Mosuo goddess; Gemu Goddess; feminist anthropology; heritagization; experimental anthropology

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抽象的

人类学家最近寻找着一些新的分析文化变迁的方式，包括从非人类的角度来思考文化生态区域的方式。本文一方面从摩梭女神的角度来考虑近代的文化与生态变迁，另一方面带着一位多年观察女神的人类学家的视角与分析。中国西南山区的摩梭人每年都会过一个崇拜格姆女神的转山节。通过旅游业与市场经济的发展、当地人的人口流动、还有不同关于摩梭非物质文化遗产的政策，此节日也经历过很多转变与波动。从女神的角度如何看待这些转变？通过当地人和外来人的经验，包括来自不同社区的摩梭人以及来自国内外地区的游客和崇拜女神文化的人，本文探讨不同的想法，给予其他想接近本土宗教中神灵的学者一些启发。

关键词：摩梭女神、格姆女神、遗产化、女神学、创造性人类学

Résumé

Cet article examine comment les divinités animistes peuvent être mises au premier plan en tant que personnages centraux sensibles dans la recherche ethnographique, à la suite d'appels récents à essayer de regarder à travers des perspectives non humaines alors que nous considérons les zones socio-écologiques sous différents angles. S'appuyant sur dix-huit ans d'engagement ethnographique dans une région montagneuse du sud-ouest de la Chine où les Na / Mosuo vénèrent la déesse Gemu, je superpose de nombreux récits sur la déesse et sa montagne tout en incluant ce qui peut être imaginé comme son propre point de vue. Je juxtapose des voix de personnes Na de différentes communautés et à différents moments dans le temps, des visiteurs de régions lointaines désireux de se faire une idée plus précise d'une culture adoratrice de la déesse, et l'anthropologue-auteur pour cet examen et cette exploration polyvocaux. La transformation de la déesse de divinité centrale du peuple Na en un phénomène transcendant leurs régions d'origine révèle des interactions complexes entre les habitants de longue date, la pratique animiste, le discours touristique, la politique gouvernementale et les efforts de reconnaissance et de préservation du patrimoine.

Mots-clés : Déesse Na / Mosuo, Déesse Gemu, anthropologie féministe, patrimonialisation, anthropologie expérimentale

Introduction: The Context for Goddess Fascination

For many years, goddesses have fascinated women from European-descended backgrounds whose own religions have sidelined feminine powers. Although these religions themselves often developed upon the roots of earth-mother belief systems, by the middle of the 20th century, the overwhelming male-focus of Christianity as practiced in in European, US, and Canadian settings as well as the immense trauma of midcentury global warfare left many people looking for alternative models. A collective quest ensued to recuperate 'lost' female divinity by locating goddesses, both in prehistorical records and in other parts of the world. Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas published research about goddesses and gods of 'old Europe' (1982 [1974], 1993), philosopher Heide Göttner-Abendroth wrote *Matriarchal Mythology in Former Times and Today* (1987), and Carol P. Christ wrote *Rebirth of the Goddess* (1997), to name but a few examples. Anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday researched places where women are 'at the center,' arguing for a broadened definition of matriarchy (2002), and Göttner-Abendroth built on her previous matriarchy-focused publications to gather a network of researchers focused on what she called 'societies in balance.'[1] Some of this research was controversial (see Goddess Movement, n.d., for a review), but the ideas discussed nonetheless proved enormously influential both in academic and popular settings. An entire subculture of goddess seekers emerged, with their own websites, conferences, publications and even pilgrimages.[2]

In 2003, after I had already completed my first year of anthropological fieldwork in Mosuo communities of southwest China, I became involved with one of these goddess-searches when I served as the simultaneous interpreter for an international conference held in Lijiang and at Lugu Lake, China. Two women had traveled from the United States expressly to seek out goddess culture and learn more about the Mosuo people, yet were frustrated by the male-centric aspects even of a conference designed to showcase what was billed as a matriarchal culture. Mosuo women were present, to be sure, but most served as beautifully dressed tea-pourers, even those who held government positions. Only on the last day, after I intervened with the conference organizers, did Ninglang County leader Cao Jianping get her chance to address the audience. Everyone was excited to hear her impassioned, impromptu speech, particularly the non-Chinese speakers for

[1] Göttner-Abendroth would later publish a comprehensive English-language book about matriarchal cultures (2013), building on a series of World Matriarchal Congresses that gathered representatives from many different countries to share and learn together, and further developing her 1988 German-language monograph, *Das Matriarchat.* See https://www.hagia.de/en/matriarchy/matriarchal-studies/ for details.

[2] Here I focus on the North American- and European-based scholarship and discussion of goddesses. An extensive Asian-based scholarship on female and ambiguously gendered deities exists as well. For one example, see Gopi (2020). For details on a pilgrimage to Crete, see https://www.goddessariadne.org/page-3.

whom I was interpreting. But it was over all too soon. I knew how difficult it was to get all the way to Lugu Lake from the US, and I was thinking about launching some kind of career that would allow me to live in northwest China and still earn a reasonable income, without being tied to a fixed work affiliation that would preclude travel. So I offered to help them learn more about the Mosuo goddess, Gemu. For several days, we visited families and individuals who could share wisdom about Gemu and made an off-season pilgrimage to the shrine honoring Gemu, on the slopes facing her mountain. The trip inspired a short piece by one of the visitors, published in the provocatively titled volume, *If Women Ruled the World* (Wolverton 2004). While I ultimately rejected a career of goddess-seeker-guiding in favor of a more established (and funded) graduate school path back in the United States, my interest in the Gemu goddess was piqued. I began paying more attention to the stylized murals, tapestries, and shrines that bore her image, and taking note of her presence in songs (cf. Yang 2023; also Bliss 2004).

As I returned over the years, my appreciation for the goddess Gemu deepened. I also grew to appreciate how multiple interpretations coexisted alongside one another in this fascinating place. However, finding an appropriate way to convey her stories and share the remarkable role she plays within a remarkable community has collided with a demand in feminist research to avoid speaking for people, especially when we have not conducted explicitly designed research projects aimed at alleviating, or at least ameliorating, ethical dilemmas of representation. I returned to China after two years of graduate school and developed a collaborative project, decentering my own role as I collaborated with the directors of the Mosuo Folk Museum to launch the Moso Media Project in 2005. Instead of only writing my own thoughts and interpretations, we worked together to gather and interpret films, screen them locally, and hold discussions after the screenings. We developed a media production workshop, each contributing resources to bring in an experienced filmmaker and make the workshop possible. And we sought funds together, strengthened by our mix of national, gender and other identities, even procuring funds to support the 2006 Mosuo Film Festival from the all-important Tourism Management Committee (see Blumenfield Kedar 2010 for a full discussion of this project).

This collaboration became extraordinarily meaningful and rewarding, and has become an important cornerstone of my work in this community. However, I came to realize that while we could and did find ways to co-create that fulfilled our distinct agendas, we had very different priorities. I needed to speak in ways intelligible to the English-speaking academy, which prioritized written forms over all else. They did not. They needed to showcase their collections and earn enough operating income to cover expenses, and find time to film, edit and produce projects. This did not preclude our cooperation - indeed, we would later release a film, *Some Na Ceremonies* (Onci, Ruheng and Blumenfield 2015) and co-create a photo exhibit (Blumenfield, Ruheng and Onci 2016) - but the lessons I had learned in graduate school about decolonizing research through co-authorship of written

work (Swarr and Nagar 2010; Sangtin Writers Collective and Richa Nagar 2006; cf. Smith 1999) were not always relevant in this particular context. Each of us was very busy, and producing a text was simply not an important goal or effective use of time for anyone but me. Moreover, co-authorship in an authoritarian political environment carried potential risks, hardly what I wished on any collaborator or trusted friend.

Gradually I became more comfortable with a different style of authorial production, one that I draw from here. In keeping with a long tradition of humanistic, auto-ethnographic work that mixes personal experiences and emotions with more standard forms of ethnography (Behar 2022 [1996], Rosaldo 1989, Wolf 1992), I foreground my own experience learning about, interpreting, and even imagining the Gemu goddess. I also draw directly on the voices of Mosuo people to share who this goddess is, why she is important, and how she is celebrated. While I do not exactly replicate Margery Wolf's strategy of going through the same events three times—offering fieldnotes, a published academic article, and a short story (1992) —I do offer several versions in order to highlight both parallels and divergences among different narrators, speaking at different times. I integrate their accounts with my own experiences both attending and observing from afar, the festival honoring Gemu. This festival becomes an opportunity to trace intersections of emotions, politics and practice, and to experiment with thinking through these events from the perspective of the goddess Gemu.

None of these methods should make this article academically inappropriate. Instead, the article can be considered a realistic integration of priorities within feminist and anthropological scholarship: foregrounding different voices; representing a long-term engagement and commitment to a place where people feel dishonored by short-term researchers; and making plain my own positionality as well as the context through which my interpretations take place (cf. Davis and Craven 2016).

Finally, this article takes seriously the question of how animist deities can themselves be foregrounded as sentient central characters in ethnographic research. In the past decade, anthropologists like Marisol de la Cadena (*Earth Beings*, 2015) and Tsai et al. (*Golden Snail Opera*, 2016) have moved beyond simply describing spiritual realms and belief systems, to thinking through an interspecies and cosmologically multiple way of analyzing and experiencing anthropological zones of inquiry. Here I follow these scholars' calls to try looking through new perspectives, not always human ones, as we consider socio-ecological zones from different angles and layers.

Interpretations, versions and translations

In 2005, as the Mosuo Folk Museum directors and I worked to prepare the first-ever Mosuo Film Festival, we spent many hours screening potential films together in the

museum office. One day while we watched a European-produced documentary, I provided ad-hoc simultaneous interpretation of the English-language voiceovers into Mandarin Chinese. This had proven necessary because even with dialogue in Chinese or the Na language, the voiceovers drowned out the original speakers.

After I finished translating one legend with a particularly surprising story, something giving men a very tiny role with the creation of new humans, I turned to Archei and asked, "Is that how it is [是不是这样]?"

He responded with a twinkle in his eye: "Mm, there are many versions [嗯，版本很多]." Archei neither refuted nor confirmed the story I had just translated, which was unlike anything I had heard before.

This brief conversation encapsulated an important lesson that would help me during future research: rather than thinking in a simplistic right/wrong, yes/no framework of absolutes, multiple interpretations could be perfectly acceptable. Complete understanding might prove elusive, but did this matter? Or rather, for whom did this matter? In many circumstances, circling around a topic might be a better approach than a definitive answer.

Marisol de la Cadena came to a similar conclusion while working with a powerful father-son duo from a Quechua community in the Peruvian Andes. She struggled to make local conceptions of a particularly tricky idea legible, asking her friend Nazario, the younger intermediary between humans and earth-beings, to explain over and over again. Eventually he beseeched several different earth-beings to bestow understanding and compassion through their conversation, and she finally understood the need to let go, to leave the understanding partial in order to retain respect for the whole. She wrote, "Our mutual understanding was also going to be full of gaps that would be different for each of us, and would constantly show up, interrupting but not preventing our communication… While our interactions formed an effective circuit, our communication did not depend on sharing single, cleanly identical notions—theirs, mine, or a third new one." (de la Cadena 2015: xxv)

This willingness to think expansively and non-dualistically helps set the stage for our explorations of the goddess Gemu, the legends which surround and accompany her, and the multiple forms and meanings that she has come to inhabit nowadays. Like de la Cadena (2015), who found a complicated spiritual-ecological topography of interlocking and also aporetic meanings in the Andes, I also found that trying to establish a single, straightforward narrative was not only difficult, it was unnecessary and even inappropriate.

Thinking through Place and Spirit: Stepping Closer to the Goddess Gemu

In *Wisdom Sits in Places*, Keith Basso (1996) drew connections between spiritual dimensions, landscape and culture among the Western Apache, native to North America. He was among the forerunners of the anthropology of place, now a vibrant area of inquiry and theoretical development for anthropologists and other social scientists. One way in which spiritual aspects are closely integrated with ideas of place is through sacred mountains, rivers and lakes, many associated with deities.

Many spirit mountains exist, both in this region and elsewhere, for it is not uncommon for a mountain rising sharply outside an inhabited plain to be looked upon as a spiritual entity. Ausangate, an earth-being in the Andes, has a mountain form visible from Cuzco; this mountain is also considered a Catholic shrine (de la Cadena 2015). Closer to Lugu Lake, Coggins and Gesang Zeren (2014) have written about the broader concept of animate landscapes in Yunnan Province, while da Col (2014), Litzinger (2004), and Previato (2021) have written about the complicated dynamics of the Tibetan sacred mountain known as Khawa Karpo or Kawagebo. Litzinger explains, "Kawagebo…properly belongs to that classification of mountains known by Tibetans as neri, literally translated as 'mountain abode.' Mountains such as Kawagebo are considered to be places of residence and activity of certain important deities. This means that not only is the deity thought to dwell in or in the vicinity of the mountain, but also that the deity is seen to be the equivalent to the mountain itself." (Litzinger 2004: 496).

But if a deity is also a mountain, then what happens when people relocate to other places? As people experience unprecedented mobility, with many moving from village homes to urban ones, how do their mountain deities adapt?

For while people travel, landscapes and the deities inscribed within do so only with difficulty. Mountains, for example, crumble, shake and fall, but generally do not transport themselves along great distances, at least not while remaining intact. Clearly, although some elements can transplant effectively to their new locales, some simply cannot.

Among those who cannot move easily is the Gemu goddess who inhabits a Yongning mountain. While some deities in other cultures have been known to migrate alongside those whose worlds they inhabit, this is not always possible — or at least, a precedent for this may not yet exist (cf. de la Cadena 2015). Three Na people, through a series of intermediaries, bring Gemu's story into Chinese-speaking and English-reading worlds.

First: Gemu
Geze Dorje, from a village near Lugu Lake, provided this narrative to American linguist Liberty Lidz around 2005, speaking in the Yongning Na language. Geze Dorje then

translated his narrative into Chinese. Lidz, in turn, created an English version and included it in her doctoral dissertation (Lidz 2010).[3]

> Long, long ago at the foot of Goddess Mountain, that place, in this Na village, there was a girl named Gemu. She was very beautiful; she excelled in work and such.
>
> When she sewed hemp cloth, she could weave over a dozen measures every day. When weaving hemp cloth, whatever she saw, she could embroider on the hemp cloth. Heaven's rainbows and clouds flying by, she could quickly embroider on the hemp cloth. Flowers, butterflies, and birds on the ground, and more. Whatever she saw she could embroider on the hemp cloth. Flowers and such, she could embroider them all true-to-life.
>
> So, in all the Na areas, all of the young men liked her. All of them thought her the best. A lot of young men went to see her. But she didn't like any of them. Whoever went to visit her, she would give a belt. Her name in the Na areas was, that we known by all of the Na youth. She was considered to be the best. There wasn't anyone who didn't know
> her.
>
> One day a god when he was visiting from the heavens, saw Gemu. So, he wondered who this beautiful girl was. He went to where Gemu was to look.
>
> So after that every night he went to see Gemu and Gemu also really liked him. So, all the time the two were together on a mountaintop, every night they went to a mountaintop to sing and dance. Often it was like this.
>
> One day, this god's mother found out. She said it was not possible for her son to court a regular girl. She shut their son up in their home. Often in this way he was not allowed to go down to earth. She said that if he went again he would be shut up for his entire life and he wouldn't be able to do so again. So, it was like this for a long time afterwards.
> One day, the son escaped from home to the outside world. He went to see Gemu. So, on the mountain the two alternatively cried and sang for a long time. So when it was almost daylight Gemu went to sleep. While she was asleep, the god stealthily rode his horse, leaping up to the sky. When the rooster was just about to crow Gemu woke up and saw that this man and all of his things were gone. So she followed his path and then came back. Up to

[3] Because this version, entitled simply *Gemu*, was recorded as part of a linguistic documentation project, it prioritizes faithfulness to the original narrative form.

that point she only saw one hoofprint. So, seeing the hoofprint, she cried.

So, she cried and cried; her tears filled the hoofprint. So, from the heavens the god turned his head to look. When he turned his head to look seeing Gemu crying in this manner he thought it very pitiable. He took a string of pearls from around his neck and threw it in front of Gemu. When it fell, it fell into the hoofprint. That string of pearls thrown into the hoofprint became the island in present-day Lugu Hu.

Consequently, Gemu thought for a long time. So, she went to the top of the mountain and turned herself into a cliff. So, she prayed to all of the gods. So, she has protected Na areas for generations. She herself went to protect everything. So, she also protects young people courting and such things that parents do not permit. Things they do not permit.

(Lidz 2010: 616-617)

Second: Goddess Gemu

This story, narrated by Wengjima Luruo, was recorded by Kunming-based Na scholar Lamu Gatusa in 1990, then translated by him into written Chinese. The story comes to us in English, translated and introduced by Kunming-based Yi scholar An Xiaoke and published in a Columbia University Press anthology on Chinese folk and popular religion (Wengjima, Lamu and An 2011).

Long, long ago, there was a beautiful girl who lived in Zabo Village by Lake Lugu in Yongning county. Seven days after her birth, she could speak as well as sing pleasant songs. Three months after her birth, she knew everything about the world. By the age of three, she was as beautiful as winter jasmine. Her beauty spread over nine mountains and eighteen villages. Many people came around to see how beautiful she was. When she was eighteen years old, all the young men came to propose to her. The proposal songs were like flowing water, and the proposal gifts piled up like hills. But the girl didn't promise herself to anyone. Her name was Gemu.

One day, when she was helping her mother work the fields, the heavenly spirit took a fancy to her. He turned into a whirlwind and swept Gemu away. Gemu shouted from the sky, but the god held her tightly in his grip.

Everyone in Yongning county saw her and heard her voice. People cried out. The voice sounded like thunder. The spirit heard the voice and became flustered. He suddenly dropped Gemu. Gemu fell on top of Lion Mountain and

> could not get down. From then on, she rode a white horse, holding a pearl tree in her left hand and a flute in her right hand. Gemu strolled about the hills of Yongning county, guarding the people's safety. When storms or whirlwinds came, Gemu became a white cloud over the mountains, warning people to be prepared. The local people were very thankful. On the twenty-fifth day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, people celebrated the Mountain Worshipping Festival. During the festival, people sang and danced around the mountain, recalling her good deeds.

No ordinary goddess, she is one of the most important deities of the Na people. As such, she engaged in visiting relationships - and not with just one lover, but with several. Wengjima Luruo described the goddess Gemu's relationships as follows:

> Like mortals, Goddess Gemu had her own *axia* lovers. Her long-term axia was the god Warubura. Her temporary axias were the gods Zeji and Gosa. Once Warubura went on an outing and Gemu made a date with the god Zeji. At midnight, Warubura came back. He happened to see the two together. Warubura was so angry that he pulled out his sword and cut off the god Zeji's genitals. Down to today, the god Zeji still lacks genitals. Another time, the god Gosa made a secret tryst with Gemu while Warubura was out. But they became at odds with each other. The god Gosa wanted to leave Gemu and stay with another lover - Lady Changshan. Gemu hated to lose Gosa, and she pulled him by a sleeve. In this way, one pulled one way while the one pulled the other way until dawn. When the roosters crowed, they had to stop. Since then, with one sleeve belonging to Gosa in Gemu's hand, they stay close by each other's side.
>
> (Wengjima, Lamu and An 2011: 54-55)

Though these legends about Gemu appear to diverge in some ways - exactly who played what role in Gemu's relationship with that descended-from-heaven visiting god? - the common themes are her role in protecting Yongning and the Na people, as well as her passion, talent and beauty. Given the many layers of translation involved with learning about her and subsequently, sharing her stories - these conversations usually take place in some mixture of 'standard' Mandarin, northwest Yunnanese Mandarin, and Naru, with a smattering of European languages, before being translated or interpreted back into a European language - these multiple meanings are hardly a surprise.

Third: The Goddess Gamu

Lamu Gatusa, director of the Minzu Literature Research Institute at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences in Kunming and the recorder of the previous narrative, was probably

the first Na person to crisscross mountain regions with his tape recorders and other recording gear, interviewing elders, recording chants and legends, and capturing songs. Originally from the Labai region, his introductions to Gemu have appeared in previous volumes of this journal (Lamu 2021) via translator and fellow Na specialist Christine Mathieu. His description below emphasizes the role that Gemu Goddess plays among Mosuo people.

> On the twenty-fifth day of the seventh lunar month, we Mosuo celebrate the mountain deities. Among these mountain deities there are both goddesses and gods, but the most important of them all, the deity who is worshipped with the most solemnity and the most important rituals, is the mountain goddess Gamu. Gamu has no rivals amongst the mountain gods. She towers over the Yongning plain and she looks like a crouching lion, so that other nationalities call her the Lion Mountain. To the Mosuo, she is only the Goddess Gamu. The Mosuo sing praises to her beauty, and tell her stories in many legends. She is the goddess of beauty, love, protection, and birth, and she is endowed with all powers and qualities. To the Mosuo, the Mountain Goddess Gamu is a monument to women. She is the deity who holds the world in balance.
>
> (Lamu 2021: 166)

This poetic rendering of this mountain goddess, as a literal monument to women, encapsulates the esteem and power ascribed to Gemu by those in her orbit. Indeed, from many angles she resembles a lion, reclining regally. Perched right on the Yunnan and Sichuan provincial border next to Yongning and Lugu Lake, her impossible-to-miss form reminds anyone who passes by or glances up that Gemu Goddess is watching. Interestingly, Christine Mathieu notes, “The Mosuo are alone among their neighbors to have a guardian mother goddess rather than a patron warrior god” (2003: 399).

Taken together, these three translations help us better understand the origins of Gemu the person, Gemu the mountain, and Gemu the protector-deity, perhaps even something like a patron saint of the Na people.[4] Clearly, the goddess Gemu occupies a unique place among a unique group of people, or perhaps more precisely, among closely related

[4] Two additional sources also offer insight into the local cosmology. They include He (2003), who explores matrilineal forest management, and Rosati Freeman (2015), who provides an account of her visit to Mosuo communities, including her investigations of goddess culture.

groups of people.[5] As one of the most important Mosuo deities, she reflects the central roles and status accorded to women in her community.

Murals, Images and Incarnations: Fieldwork in the Shadow of a Watchful Goddess

I do not recall noticing the presence of the goddess Gemu, other than her sprawling mountain form, the first time I visited the region as a disoriented young anthropologist affiliated with the Yunnan Institute of Nationalities.[6] Gradually, though, the disorientation lessened. I began to see her wherever tourists visited - in vivid color. The goddess was inside the island temple on Hliwobi, appearing on a tapestry, in a stylized Gelugpa Buddhist form (cf. Tsem 2016) (Figure 1). She graced a mural in front of a building, as well as a hotel lobby wall in Luoshui Village (Figure 2). And she appeared in another framed image on her mountain, on a small altar partway up where her followers laid prayer flags and sprinkled grains during the annual festival in her honor (Figure 3).

Figures 1 – 3: Images of Gemu Goddess

Figure 1: Inside the Hliwobi Island temple in Lugu Lake, appearing as a tapestry in a stylized Gelugpa Buddhist form. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield, 2003; reproduction prohibited.

[5] In Sichuan Na people are classified as *Menggu zu* (Mongolian), while in Yunnan they officially are Naxi *zu* Mosuo *ren* – Mosuo people of the Naxi nationality. Particularly near Lugu Lake, *Menggu zu* has been gradually replaced by *Mosuo*, a teknonym that is in common usage for anyone speaking about Na Chinese. In my writings I use both Na and Mosuo as appropriate, and follow local usage when possible. That is, when translating a Chinese text that uses the term Mosuo, I retain that term in the translation. For further discussion of this nomenclature, see Blumenfield Kedar 2010. See also Latami (2009) about the Na people of Ninglang and Mattison et al. 2021 for analysis of relationships of Yongning and Labai Na. The core areas are Labai, Lugu Lake, Yongning, Wenquan, and Ninglang in Yunnan; and Guabie, Zousuo, Qiansuo, and Wujiao in Sichuan.

[6] Having focused on East Asian Studies in college, I arrived in China to begin my Fulbright fellowship with a weak background in anthropology. A semester studying with ethnology professors in Kunming before embarking upon fieldwork was extremely helpful, but could not substitute for robust methodological preparation.

Figure 2: On a hotel lobby wall, in the Upper Village of Luoshui. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield, 2003; reproduction prohibited.

Figure 3: The Gemu goddess, in a framed figure on a small altar partway up the mountain. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield, 2003; reproduction prohibited.

I spent many days doing fieldwork under the watchful goddess' presence: walking from one home to another in several villages where I worked involved moving through the basin below her sprawling montane form. I often walked alone, and I appreciated her calming energy as I navigated rain, sun, mud and various encounters along the way. She anchored me. When I began focusing on media produced in Na communities, if I saw others' images or found her mountain form appear on a screen, I could instantly tell where the image-maker had filmed from. Both in intangible forms like legends and stories, and in tangible forms like colorful, framed images, the goddess and her mountain form were a constant presence.

Although my initial research topic did not include goddesses or legend-gathering, as discussed above, Gemu began to capture my attention more often. I frequently heard both tour guides and documentary narrators extol her merits and intrigue as they introduced Mosuo culture to outsiders. And after that feminist ethnology conference in Lijiang and at Lugu Lake in 2003, I sought out a grandmother who could chant the Gemu Soyi scripture (in the Na language) while her granddaughter translated, in a hearthside environment that was warm in more ways than one. The undercurrent running through all these environments was one of female strength, power, and agency. Gemu is not a demure goddess who trembles in the presence of her male counterparts. No, the Na goddess is very much in control. She creates storms and demands obeisance, even as she holds power over personal and community-wide fertility. But she does this with a strong set of emotions that she is not afraid to display. She cares about others, and she loves deeply. Whether her approaches are reflected by Na people, or Na people emphasize those aspects which mirror their own values, one can definitely see reflections of each in the other.

Some may question whether Gemu truly holds these powers. After all, how can we be sure she is the one causing storms and impacting fertility? David Hufford (1982) points out that these questions stem from a propensity to adhere to our own belief systems, often elevating these as religion and assuming them credulous while denigrating other people's belief systems as beliefs or superstitions only. For example, anthropologists might think when considering non-Christian individuals, "What I believe, I know, but what you believe, you only believe" (Hufford 1982). In Peru, Nazario described how Ausangate, the earth-being, was angry about the airplanes flying overhead. For not only were the frequent flights causing harm to the streams and waterways, they were also turning Ausangate black, literally (de la Cadena 2015: xxii). Just like Gemu, Ausangate could grow enraged. And he too could vent his fury on those attempting to grow crops down below. They are far from the only mountain-deities with these attributes.

The Goddess and Her Festival: Cycles of Transformation, Heritagization, and Quiet

I first participated in the annual festival honoring the goddess Gemu in 2002. Returning to Yongning following a several-month absence and finding all the families I had stayed with and grown to care about gathered in clusters on a mountain slope, with exuberant dancers just below stepping circles as music filled the air, was beyond extraordinary. Remembering that joyful atmosphere and energy, people arriving on horseback and tractor, oh! Even from my living room on the other side of the world, I can still feel that so strongly, twenty years later (Figures 4 – 6)

Images 4 – 6, at the 2002 Gemu Ha-ku festival, known in Chinese as Zhuan Shan Jie 转山节, *or Circling-the-Mountain Festival)*

Figure 4: Families picnic at the Circling-the-Mountain festival. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield; reproduction prohibited.

Figure 5: Circle dancing at the 2002 festival. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield; reproduction prohibited.

Figure 6: Arriving to the 2002 festival via horseback. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield; reproduction prohibited.

I returned for the festival the following year, and then the year after that as well. Managing to be in southwest China in late August each year became increasingly difficult

as my family grew and my career progressed, but I continued following the festival's development from afar.

The festival looked a little different every year, some years receiving more robust government support for organized dancing activities and stages, and some years receiving less. No single government unit was tasked with running what had long been an unofficial folk festival. This created some uncertainties about who was in charge and how activities would be funded. When I visited the Yongning Education Office one of those early years, I was surprised to learn that they were the ones in charge of preparing activities for the festival that year. They enthusiastically showed me plans to revive an enormous wooden swing that had been popular years before.

As tourism to the region grew, and cultural activities began to move under the umbrella of 'intangible cultural heritage,' new institutions like the Lijiang-Lugu Lake Tourism Management Committee became involved in the planning. Given their mission of promoting and managing tourism, priority during that period went to attracting outside visitors to the festival. The general trend was that the festival was increasingly flooded with outside visitors, yet steadily less well attended by Na people.

Singapore attorney and writer Choo Wai-Hong included extensive details on the festival and its various incarnations in her book (2017). By her account, she found a festival that had faded from its energetic heyday, and decided to do her part to revive it. Choo poured money into the festival, sponsoring competitions, awarding prizes, and inspiring people to action. Other people who were involved in festival planning during those intervening years, like the leaders of the Mosuo Folk Museum, have a different interpretation and would give a bit less credit to Choo as a festival-savior, but her contributions were appreciated nonetheless.

The situation would change altogether in 2018. As part of a broader emphasis on recognizing and designating intangible cultural heritage (Blumenfield 2018), in 2018 the Ninglang Yi Autonomous County declared the Circling-the-Mountain Festival to be an official three-day holiday at the county-level. Its express purpose? Promoting "the integration of tourism and culture" and building "a cultural brand."[7] This declaration would elevate the Gemu goddess to previously unimaginable physical proportions. From

[7] A news article by the Lijiang Television Station provided the official rationale for this change: to create a cultural brand. The article stated, "On June 28, 2018, the Ninth Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Seventeenth National People's Congress of Ninglang Autonomous County decided to list the Mosuo People's Mountain Festival as a local statutory festival to promote the integration of culture and tourism and enhance the tourism culture brand of Wuhu. "The 'Zhuan Shan Jie' will be used as a regional business card and a cultural brand in Lijiang." (https://www.lijiangtv.com/article/83359-p-1.html, accessed March 2019; translation by author.)

then on, an enormous tapestry-banner bearing her image would be lifted high above a raised stage with much fanfare, as part of the official festivities' opening (Figure 7). Monks chanted as Gemu rose (Figure 8), and Na *daba* moved rhythmically on the stage, cymbals and percussive instruments in hand.[8] How high did she rise? Thirty feet, or perhaps more? She certainly loomed above everyone, her half-smile perhaps mirroring that of the mountain just beyond.

Figure 7: An enormous tapestry-banner bearing the goddess Gemu's figure is lifted hig above a raised stage with much fanfare, as part of the official festivities' opening. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield, 2019. Reproduction prohibited.

[8] For further discussion of *daba*, see Li 2015 and Mathieu 1998.

Figure 8: Monks chanted and sounded their instruments as Gemu rose. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield, 2019; reproduction prohibited.

Figure 9: Horse racing competition at the 2019 festival. Photograph by Tami Blumenfield, 2019; reproduction prohibited.

Figure 10: An opening ceremony at the 2019 festival, held away from the goddess mountain herself. The words say 转山转湖转 风情 *[Circumambulate the mountain, Circumambulate the lake, Circumambulate the fengqing (winds and feelings)]. Image source: Zhongguo ribao wang, http://yn.chinadaily.com.cn/2018-09/05/content_36869377.htm.*

This carefully choreographed process, which I saw for myself when I finally managed to return in 2019 (Figure 9), was quite different from what I had witnessed during those early years of fieldwork. During that period, the festival was more universally attended by locals but much more sparsely attended by outsiders. Ironically, as it gained official status, the festival lost local support. That first official year, the clutch of media representatives and the incursion of VIP tables and official representatives in front of the stage, combined with the increased number of spectators jostling to get a look at an authentic ethnic festival, simply overwhelmed. The rudimentary roads leading past several villages to the corner of the Yongning plain, though recently improved and resurfaced, could not handle the volume. After all, the key arterial ran in between rice paddies as it transected the plain, and could only accommodate vehicles in a single direction. Usually this involved a dance of drivers, yielding, approaching, and reversing. On the festival day, the crush of drivers all trying to reach the same mountain slopes, without experience in the local

protocols—what could result but complete chaos? The traffic jams became new goddess-festival legends. And what must the goddess have thought, reclining above it all?

After the 2018 festival, one local friend told me grumpily, "I'm never going again! There were toooo many people, way too many. Afterwards we were stuck for hours, the vehicles were all jammed together and no one could get anywhere. It was so not fun." (太不好玩了)

He was not the only one who was miserable that year. In fact, the 2018 festival (Figure 10) probably represented the festival's peak, and marked the beginning of a new trend. Though the next year witnessed large crowds and substantial media coverage, many local people decided to celebrate elsewhere. Rather than ascending the Gemu Goddess Mountain and stringing their prayer flags upon her shrine, chanting and tossing sacred grains as they circled the small pavilion, they decided to gather in their own villages, in the sacred areas closer to home.

They still prepared food to roast and tea to drink, and still performed their devotions, but they no longer did so in the company of their compatriots from other villages. Perhaps the mountain could not sustain the new load, and this shift represented a healthy new development. In the 2020s, with COVID-19 pandemic-related precautions discouraging large gatherings, this probably made sense. But thinking back to those early days, and the magic of seeing people from across the Yongning plain all gathered in one place, I cannot help feeling a bit sad. This festival is the only holiday celebrated just by Na people, and represented the only time for everyone in the region to converge together. What must the goddess think, as she watches everyone disperse?

This dispersal is not merely a matter of a single festival day, but encapsulated by it. More Na people have relocated to cities than ever before. Place still matters, but gathering together is harder than ever. On the other hand, Lijiang, about a five-hour drive from Yongning when landslides of unhappy carved-up mountains do not prevent forward progress, has become home for many younger Na and their accompanying elders. The mountain slopes surrounding Lijiang can also host goddess-worshipping rituals and picnics. Groups of Na relatives and friends do gather together for this and other celebrations - my WeChat feed is full of images and videos from their birthday parties, singing nights, and meals together. The difference is that these are closed networks, and these moments are by invitation only. (Although those following along via social media can join in vicariously, many social media platforms themselves are closed networks.) Does the goddess mourn the loss of inclusivity, as she recalls the days when everyone gathered in the same place, to worship her together? Or has she lifted her chin high and risen up higher, the better to see her people in their farther-away regions?

Discussion

In his article, 'Festivals, Group Making, Unmaking and Remaking,' João Leal (2016) discusses the complicated and not-only celebratory role played by a festival practice of former Azorean residents who had moved to the United States. Their Holy Ghost festas were most active as their celebrants first relocated. But later, as people integrated into their local communities, these festas became less important. In a parallel development, in the islands themselves, efforts to help these festas receive official recognition through UNESCO-level reflected a newly created, newly formalized and perhaps even newly invented festival format aimed at capitalizing on policies of heritagization (cf. di Giovine 2009, Kuah and Liu 2016, Stefano and Davis 2017).[9]

Megan Bryson, who has written about the Baijie goddess worshipped by many Bai, also emphasizes how politics and historical changes affect goddess worship and celebrations. Not far from Yongning, in the Dali region where Bai people live, this goddess has played very different roles over time in order to fit into the needs and political realities of the local people. Bryson writes, "As Dali changed from an independent political center to a peripheral region in a vast empire, Baijie similarly changed from a dragon maiden and consort of Mahākāla called Baijie Shengfei to a chaste widow martyr known as Baijie Furen. The dynamic aspects of Baijie's identity mirrored the dynamism of local identity (Bryson 2016: 2)." Gemu, too, has been variously celebrated, hushed, or invoked as politics of religion and belief, connections with neighboring cultures, and presence of outsiders through tourism, research and media have waxed and waned. The 2018 festival represented a recombination of sorts, with not only Mosuo practices but also those of local Han, Naxi and other *minzu* groups all celebrated through performances and awards. Perhaps this is the beginning of the Gemu goddess' transformation, from a local deity tied to a place, to a transnational one who transcends place. This may be a welcome development for the goddess-seeking foreigners, at least.

Conclusion

Reaching the end of this story still feels like only a beginning. We have collected some of the stories that took place in years past. We gather the legends, and record the songs, while people can still share them in the Na language. (And we are beginning work to gather these recordings together, in the Pangloss archive and elsewhere, and welcome contributors for this project.[10]) But I cannot help but return to a question posed in an

[9] For further discussion of festival dynamics and anthropological interpretations of them, see Addo (2009) and Chio (2019). Ohri (2016) delves into the political dimensions of festival heritagization in the India context.

[10] See the Yongning Na Pangloss archive, based in France (Michaud, n.d.). https://pangloss.cnrs.fr/corpus/Yongning%20Na?lang=en

earlier essay, written years ago: 女儿国，你将何从何来? O country of daughters, wherever will you go from here? (Blumenfield 2004).

If we are perched on the edge of some radical changes in Na communities, as so many people move away but others find new opportunities closer to home, will we be able to look back again in twenty more years with joy in our hearts, after seeing efforts to support a thriving, contemporary Mosuo culture bear fruit? For the Museum of the Mosuo People, an official branch of the Yunnan Provincial Museum,[11] the Mosuo Culture Protection and Development Research Center of the Lijiang City Government, and the Lijiang International Matrilineal Culture Research Association,[12] all led by incredible and indefatigable Mosuo people, are each taking action in their own ways, working hard to sustain thriving communities and capture their lessons for future generations.

As for my dilemmas about appropriate representation and finding ways to share voices of Mosuo people with broader audiences, the *Matrix* journal itself has supported this effort. With its focus on matricultures, it has become a venue through which I can translate written work by Mosuo artists, writers, and musicians, then help their words find broader audiences (cf. Banamu 2023, Yang 2023). Hopefully these two contributions will be the first of many.

It is no mean feat to reach the 21st century in a Chinese-speaking, Han-dominated nation with a matrilineal, matrifocal community thriving. We can only hope that these next decades will witness gentle continuation of goddess-inspired matricultures like that of the Mosuo people, taking on new forms and locales, perhaps, but honoring the spirits which have sustained them thus far as well. Then it will be a pleasure to walk through the villages of Yongning and feel the goddess looking down. Perhaps that half-smile we see on the goddess images nowadays will have turned into more of a grin. *Ding-bu-er djeh kuh*![13]

About the Author

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[11] This is the new name for the Mosuo Folk Museum. Onci Archei and Ruheng Duoji remain its directors, but they can now receive support from provincial-level museum experts as well.

[12] The Lijiang Matrilineal Culture Research Association (International) was founded by Cao Jianping in 2020. https://m.yunnan.cn/system/2020/08/18/030894778.shtml

[13] This is the greeting shared by Mosuo people on happy occasions, especially the celebrations of the lunar New Year and other holidays, as well as the arrival of the coming-of-age ceremony.

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Appendix 1: Chinese Language Legend

Story 1: Gemu, as narrated by Geze Dorje of Luoshui Village, around 2006.

很久，很久以前的时候永宁女神山的脚下，那个地方，摩梭的村转里有一个叫格姆的女孩子。她很好看，劳动和一切事情很厉害。她织麻布的时候，每一天能织十几丈。她织麻布的时候，眼睛里看见什么，都可以织在麻布上。天上的彩虹和天上的云彩飞过去就把它织在麻布上。地下的花和蝴蝶和鸟，等等。看见什么就能织在麻布上面。花儿和那些什么东西她都能够织的像一某一样的。所以摩梭的地方里头所有的小伙子们全部都喜欢她。全部算她最好。去她那里的人很多。但是她一个都不喜欢。谁去她那里的时候她送每一个人一条腰带。她的名字在摩梭地区是小伙子们的话全部知道它。她才算最好的。没有一个人不知道她。有一天一个天上的神，他从天上路过的时候看见了这个格姆。所以他想这样漂亮和好看的姑娘是什么人呢？去格姆那里看。所以后来他每一天晚上去格姆那里，格姆也很喜欢他。所以两个人每一天在一个山头上每一个晚上去山头上唱歌和跳舞。经常是这样。

有一天，这个神，他家的母亲知道了。她说他们家的儿子不可能和民间的女孩子恋爱。把他们家的儿子抓起来关在家里。经常这样不准他去下面。说如果再去就一辈子关起来不会放。所以是这样的很长时间以后。有一天这个儿子从家里逃跑到外面来。去看格姆。所以两个人山头上哭一次，唱一次，又哭一次，又唱一次。所以将要天亮的时候格姆睡着了。睡着了的时候，这个神悄悄的骑在马上跳到天上去。刚刚公鸡将要叫的时候格姆醒过来一看这个男和全部东西都不在。所以一路追去一次赶过来。到这边的时候看见只有一个马的脚印。所以看着马的脚印哭了。所以哭了又哭眼泪装满了马的脚印。所以天上的神就回头看。看格姆这样的哭他想很可怜。他把自己脖子上面的一串珍珠扔在格姆的面前。往下丢的时候，全部掉在马的脚印里面。那一串扔在马脚印的珍珠成了现在的泸沽湖的海岛。因此格姆后来就想了很多。所以她就去山的山头把自己的灵魂附在悬崖上。所以她祈求所有的神明。所以她要保护摩梭的地区时时代代的。所以她也保护年轻的人恋爱和这些家里的父母不准赶事。

(Lidz 2010: 615-616)

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"It Takes All Kinds of Trees to Make a Forest:" Trees Associated with Feminine Folklore in the Eastern Slavic Folk Calendar

REJEANNE LACROIX

Abstract

Eastern Slavic folklore, particularly mythology from Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, is innately tied to the ecosystem in which it developed. Tales and perception of the natural world consequently elevated and designated specific flora as sacred, setting the way for these species to be recognized as central to national folklore or symbolism. In myth and folklore, trees were bestowed with masculine or feminine genders either due to their grammatical categorization or traditional physical characteristics associated with the sexes. Of relevance to this analysis, trees deemed feminine influenced mystical practices for women celebrants, especially in connection to the Eastern Slavic folk calendar. Theurgy and veneration of birch, rowan, and linden trees, including folk holidays Bereshchenye, Ryabinovka, Ryabinnik, *and the Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God will be examined.*

Keywords: Eastern Slavic peoples, ethnodendrology, folk belief, folk calendar, trees

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Résumé

Le folklore des peuples slaves orientaux, en particulier la mythologie de la Biélorussie, de la Russie, et de l'Ukraine, est intimement lié à l'éco-système des régions où il s'est développé. Les contes, joints à une perception particulière du monde naturel, menèrent à considérer certaines plantes comme faisant partie du sacré, pavant la voie vers la reconnaissance de la place privilégiée de ces plantes dans le folklore slave et les système symbolique nationaux. Dans les mythes and les traditions folkloriques, les arbres sont investis d'un genre masculin ou féminin, soit à cause de l'usage linguistique habituel, soit à cause des caractères physiques associé à un genre ou l'autre. Relation pertinente dans mon analyses, les arbres considérés comme féminins sont liés aux pratiques rituelles des femmes, en particulier en connection avec le calendrier populaire des Slaves orientaux. Nous examinons la theurgie et la vénération du bouleau, du sorbier et du tilleul, et les fêtes populaires Bereshchenye, Ryabinovka, et Ryabinnik, *ainsi que la fête de la Nativité de la mère de Dieu.*

Mots-clés: Peuples slaves orientaux, ethnodendrologie, croyances folkloriques ou populaire, calendrier populaire, arbres féminins

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Introduction

The lands of the Eastern Slavic peoples - modern Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine - were untamed though plentiful, demanding yet lush. As bitterly cold winters transitioned to spring and summer, one could not know if the forthcoming growing season would result in bountiful harvests or lean times. In the pre-Christian era, adherents of ancient Slavic indigenous faiths believed that their surroundings were bound up with supernatural essences and this led to a mystical understanding of the world around them. Elements of these beliefs endured as myths that were passed down through generations by oral tradition and folk practices. Folk holidays that marked changing seasons and times where community members united in merriment are documented in folk calendars, particularly that belong to the Eastern Slavic community, one that is shared by the peoples at the centre of this analysis. As the cult of saints overtook the dominant reverence for nature, holidays formerly focused on natural processes gained Christian elements; previous beliefs remain evident, however, in folk practices.

Plants, particularly trees, were understood to act as portals that allowed spirits to enter into the living world and this principle compelled Eastern Slavs to revere certain *genera*. Trees became central figures in folk rituals where communities sought blessings like a

fruitful harvest, a productive marriage, or protection from natural forces. More often than not, the gender of the practitioner was central to the shape of the rite, as well as the season and timing of the ritual with respect to specific trees. Today, the birch, rowan, and linden are special in terms of folk calendar festivities: two have birthday celebrations and the other is associated with festivities celebrating the birth of the Mother of God.

This paper will examine the significance of birch, rowan, and linden trees in relation to folkloric beliefs and practices in the Eastern Slavic folk calendar. Much research has been completed in the fields of ethnohistory, ethnolinguistics, and ethnodendrology by Slavicists, but this investigation takes a narrower approach by using the folk calendar as its basis. This narrow focus is important because it centralizes the birch, rowan, and linden according to their respective holidays, known historically and remembered today. In order to explain this position, it is imperative to discern how Eastern Slavic peoples viewed tree symbolism and what these plants meant in their mythology and in their lives. The connection between tree symbolism and gender further explains which trees were revered and how. Finally, this enquiry will focus on the perceived gender of the selected trees and how this shaped legends about their origins and folk practices.

This analysis was crafted from the perspective of an author with maternal Ukrainian roots, a perpetual student of the Russian language, and a learner of forest stewardship. Additionally, this author has personally celebrated certain dates of the Eastern Slavic folk calendar, from the pancakes and Forgiveness Sunday of *Maslenitsa*, eating apples on Apple Spas, and visiting mountain ash trees on *Ryabinnik*. These factors stirred an intellectual aspiration to compile and nuance all these tidbits of knowledge.

Trees in Eastern Slavic Mythology and Notes on the Folk Calendar

Early Slavs were bound to the natural environment that surrounded their communities and this relationship shaped perceptions about how the world functioned. The addition of mysticism, demonstrated through reverence for deities and entities affiliated with specific flora, fauna, and forces of nature, acted as a means to explain and understand the seasonal progression of nature and related social development of its inhabitants. Many Slavic rites had ritual magical content associated with the vegetation cult - rites focused on the worship of trees, flowers, and grass.[1] Missionaries sent to study and convert local Prussian, Baltic and nearby Slavic populations in the years between 900 - 1000 CE observed such practices. For instance, the 999 CE biographical text *The Life of Saint Adalbert of Prague*, widely attributed to Benedictine monk John Canaparius, states "Most of the land is under the sway of the error of paganism, they worship the creature instead

[1] Vlasova, Galina, "Slavic and Kazakh Folklore Calendar: Typological and Ethno-Cultural Parallels", *Folklore* 63 (2016), p. 69.

of the Creator, the tree and the rock, instead of God."[2] Whilst this investigation is not focused on paganism nor these early days, this example illustrates the Eastern Slavic peoples' special relationship with trees.

Slavic tree worship was not unique though. Ethnolinguist Marina M. Valentsova argues that the Slavic cult of trees was not as developed as in neighbouring Germanic and Finnic lands, thus leading to the conclusion that mystical beliefs about trees originated in lands where Slavic peoples coexisted with the named groups.[3] Indeed, scholars Marianna Dudareva and Nina Goeva state that linguists consider a tree to be a special concept embodied into the great context of national axiology, but the type of tree is of utmost importance to understanding its symbolism.[4] Slavs subscribed to the concept of the World Tree along with cultures even further away from the heartlands of the Eastern Slavic peoples than those mentioned above; for instance, the World Tree is present, even central, in native faiths found in the Americas, Indo-European lands, and Siberia. Versions include mythical Greek olive trees known as Moriai associated with the goddess Athena, the giant ash called Yggdrasill whose leaves support the heavenly dwelling of gods in Norse mythology, and the Seneca world tree used in ceremonies of the Iroquois nation located in New York state.[5] This religious motif is important as it represents an *axis mundi* or axis of the Earth that unites the celestial bodies of the heavens, the Earth or active human existence, and the underworld.

Trees were bestowed with parallel attributes expanding them beyond simple components of nature: mystical elements with connections to other realms and the cosmos. Scholars such as Della Hooke note that trees continuously attracted attention as iconic symbols, objects of worship, and were once viewed as the pivotal axis of the cosmos throughout history.[6] Akin to the composition of the World Tree with its crown, woody trunk at the centre, and roots, Slavic folklore presents that unclean spirits live in the roots, living humans represent the trunk, and the top is associated with God.[7]

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[2] "Life of Saint Adalbert of Prague", 2.6.1, in *Sources of Slavic Pre-Christian Religion,* ed. Juan Antonio Álvarez-Pedrosa (Leiden, Brill, 2021), p. 64.

[3] Valentsova, Marina M., "K voprosu o personifikatsii dereva u slavyan" (On the question about the personification of trees among the Slavs), *Slavyanovedeniye* (Slavic Studies) Vol 6 (2017), p. 46.

[4] Dudareva, Marianna A., and Nina P. Goeva., 'White Willow in Russian Literature: Folklore "Roots" of Image', *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* Vol 8:3 (2017), p. 291.

[5] Parker, Arthur C., 'Certain Iroquois Tree Myths and Symbols', *American Anthropologist* Vol 14:4 (Oct.-Dec. 1912), p. 611.

[6] Hooke, Della., "Tree Symbolism Throughout History," in *Trees Beyond the Wood: An Exploration of Concepts of Woods, Forests, and Trees*, eds. Ian D. Rotherham, Christine Handley, Mauro Agnoletti, and Tomasz Samojlik (Sheffield, UK: Wildtrack Publishing, 2012), p. 123.

[7] Borisova, Lyudmila V., 'Kontsept «derevo» kak lingvokul'turnyy kod' (Concept of «tree» as linguacultural code), *Vestnik MGGU im. M.A. Sholokhova* (Bulletin of Sholokhov Moscow State University for the Humanities) Issue 1 (2014) p. 35.

Scholars speculate that it is the representation of the living world as the trunk of a tree or the tree's personification that may provide insight into how Eastern Slavic people viewed their interactions with trees and how this symbolism shaped their rituals. Lyudmila B. Borisova states the most important aspect of tree mythology is its correlation with humans.[8] A similar view, expressed by ethnolinguist Tatyana A. Agapkina, shares that trees in mythology symbolize a person in terms of their body, some sort of vital activity, or their fate. They play the role as a universal mediator.[9] Trees became models for describing the life of a person, their appearance and emotions insofar that trees were linked to humans according to external features.[10] As an example, the Rusyns of Transcarpathia held a folk belief that the soul of a person transferred into trees and those trees became revered.[11] Further referencing broader tree mythologies, Hooke offers "the tree itself could have been regarded as an embodiment of a godlike or ancestral spirit but it seems more likely that the trees were representative of a hidden presence."[12] Still, this is not the end of deciphering tree symbolism in East Slavic myth. Symbolic complexity is further enriched when a particular *genus* represents or behaves like a person in ritual.[13] These explanations of tree veneration consequently inform us that trees used in rituals were meant to stand on behalf of a deity, an ancestor, or simply an essence with whom people sought to create a supernatural connection. Additionally, the type of tree being honoured offers keys or clues about the intentions of invocations or simply celebratory folk practices.

Holidays related to specific trees have been remembered due to presence in the Eastern Slavic folk calendar - an almanac in folk practices related to Belarus, European Russia, and Ukraine. It should be noted that this calendar has its roots in the observations of natural cycles and agricultural phases observed by local peoples for generations. However, since the eighteenth century, numerous autonomous calendars, such as those for Christian holidays, lunar phases, and pastoral activities, have been combined in one document meant for dissemination among all sectors of society.[14] These books are useful yet entertaining reading because they showcase a variety of folk activities and conventions stated to have roots from ancient times. Folk beliefs and celebrations may have kernels of

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[8] Borisova, p. 35.

[9] Agapkina, Tatyana, 'Derevo' (Tree) in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti: Etnolingvisticheskiy slovar' v 5-ti tomakh - Tom 2. Д-К)* (Slavic Antiquities: Ethnolinguistic Dictionary in 5 Volumes - Volume 2. D-K) ed. N. Tolsoy (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya, 1999), p. 60.

[10] Puchkova, Yelena V., 'Simvolicheskiy kul'turnyy kod *derevo* v russkom yazyke' (Symbolical Cultural Code the *Tree* in Russian Language), *Epokha nauki* (Age of Science) Vol 14 (June 2018), p. 262-263.

[11] Usacheva, Valeria V., *Magiya slova i deystviya v narodnoy kul'ture slavyan* (The Magic of Words and Actions in the Folk Culture of the Slavs) (Moscow: Russian Academy of Science, 2008), p. 175.

[12] Hooke, p. 123.

[13] Dudareva and Goeva, p. 290.

[14] Tolstaya, Svetlana M., 'Kalendar' narodnyy" (Folk calendar), in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti: Etnolingvisticheskiy slovar' v 5-ti tomakh - Tom 3. К-П)* (Slavic Antiquities: Ethnolinguistic Dictionary in 5 Volumes - Volume 3. K-P) ed. Nikita Tolstoy, (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya, 2004), p. 442.

truth in relation to ancient activities, but these truths have been nuanced or changed over generations. Originally, beliefs were spread through storytelling and practice of local customs. As well, folk calendars change across regions to reflect the environment in which they were developed. It can be said that the Eastern Slavic folk calendar is an artificial construction that combines the Christian adoration of saints on their specific feast days with non-Christian revelries celebrating changes in seasons on standardized dates. On one hand, the cult of saints has become the heart of the Slavic folk calendar.[15] On the other, the calendar follows the main stages of the annual vegetation cycle.[16] It is for this reason one witnesses celebrations of honey, berries, or fruit associated loosely with religious figures in the pages of these books. Worthy of this investigation, there are activities associated with trees regarded as feminine featured in the folk calendar.

Tree Symbolism According to Gender

Following the line of argument that trees and related rituals were rooted in their connection to humans, it is then logical to explore the relation of particular species according to the categorization of gender: specifically, with women. One must probe how trees such as oak, maple, poplar and beech are classified as masculine whilst willow, pine and cherry (as well as the birch, rowan, and linden at the centre of this article) are deemed feminine. Cases made by scholars of linguistics and Slavic folklore observe that trees were classified not only by their grammatical gender, but by their physical appearances as well.

To commence, Agapkina shares that the personification of individual trees as female and male is often related to how their grammatical gender has been categorized.[17] She notes that, for example, maple (клен) is grammatically masculine whilst willow (ива) is noted as feminine. This classification is then expanded to cover objects sourced from that tree and associated rituals.[18] In a related hypothesis, ethnographer and folklorist Nikita I. Tolstoy states that language and its categories contribute to mythological thinking and mythological representation of objects such as trees.[19] However, it would be far too simple to solely rest on the argument that the abundance of folklore and myth related to gendered trees simply came down to grammar, especially as dioecious and monoecious trees populate forests. Agapkina ultimately notes that the role of trees acting as stable

[15] Vlasova, p. 71.

[16] Agapkina, 'Derevo', in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti* p. 66.

[17] Agapkina, Tatyana, 'Grammaticheskiy rod i kul'turnaya semantika: o «muzhskikh» i «zhenskikh» derev'yakh v slavyanskoy traditsii' (Grammatical Gender and Cultural Semantics: about "male" and "female" tress in Slavic tradition), *Slavyanovedeniye* (Slavic Studies) Vol 6 (2017), p. 37.

[18] Agapkina, 'Grammaticheskiy rod", p. 37.

[19] Tolstoy, Nikita I., *Yazyk i narodnaya kul'tura: Ocherki po slavyanskoy mifologii i etnolingvistike* (Moscow: Indrik, 1995), p. 337-338.

allegorical replacements is not all based on grammatical gender though it does indeed play a preliminary role.[20]

Additionally, linguist Alexander V. Kravchenko argues that it is difficult to find any real semantic justifications in the classification of inanimate nouns; he even examined certain tree species as an example. He notes, "Why is дуб (dub) oak a he, and берёза (beryoza) birch tree - a she?"[21] In answering this question in his article 'The Cognitive Roots of Gender in Russian,' Kravchenko provides an interesting and insightful hypothesis into how the early Slavs imagined the spirits inherent in their natural world, one that is central to this analysis. He posits that inanimate objects, such as trees, had their grammatical genders classified because their characteristics as well as functional uses could be aligned to those that differentiated the sexes in a human context.[22] Therefore, a big, strong sturdy oak exhibited features that early Slavs deemed masculine whilst the slim, thin, yielding рябина (ryabina/mountain ash or rowan) represented those traits aligned with femininity.[23]

It is of importance to note as well that within the same tree species, male and female specimens can exist. Slavs learned to differentiate them by their morphological and biological features, such as whether a tree bore fruit or simply pollen and if their branches grew upwards or downwards.[24] Therefore, from these observations, it is evident that physical characteristics of trees played a role in how Eastern Slavs identified trees as either masculine or feminine. Agapkina makes similar observations when noting the association of specific tree species with male and female features that are most representative of both sexes.[25] Therefore, trees linked to traditionally masculine characteristics, such as strength and power, became markers for male symbolism in folk culture and trees with seemingly female features, like bearing fruit, soft wood, and gentle beauty, betokened female representation.

These connotations around trees were subsequently applied to folkloric practices and the individuals meant to partake in specific rites. Tolstoy observes that the gender or genus of the tree in the ceremonial environment is related to the sex of person engaged in the ritual.[26] Mothers could only know to bring a sick daughter to a birch and a sick son to an oak because of a communal culture around nature and veneration of certain trees as

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[20] Agapkina, 'Grammaticheskiy rod", p. 37.
[21] Kravchenko, Alexander V., 'The Cognitive Roots of Gender in Russian', *The Slavic and East European Language Resource Center* Issue 3 (Spring 2002), p. 4.
http://cogprints.org/4007/1/RootsOfGender.pdf
[22] Kravchenko, p. 5.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Agapkina, 'Grammaticheskiy rod', p. 38.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Tolstoy, p. 338.

masculine or feminine.[27] Girls of marriageable age were instructed by their elders how to engage in rituals such as Rusal'naia Week, how to dress for rites like Ryabinovka, and why linden branches decorated homes in the springtime. Young women were prepared to enter the next stage of community membership through these communal interactions that were assisted by belief in rites and festivities. Tree symbolism and activities completed by women is evident in folk holidays mentioned in the Eastern Slavic folk calendar, particularly those related to birch, rowan, and linden.

Trees Prominent in the Folk Calendar and Related Symbolism

Trees were absolutely important to the early Slavs as they provided numerous necessities of life ranging from building materials to medicines and food sources. In addition to these essential elements for survival, both deciduous and coniferous sorts were bequeathed supernatural elements. The physical being and sometimes imposing presence of trees elicited an array of human emotions that seem to have stirred spiritual reflections.

These are especially important observations relevant to this analysis as it determines the definite linkage between trees and humans in traditional folklore. It is the addition of general experiences in the natural environment with views of gender in specific societies that consequently shape tree symbolism. Concepts of any hidden presences were linked to the given gender of trees; therefore, in the case of birch, rowan, and linden trees, days of veneration marked in folk calendars have feminine characteristics.

Берёза - Birch

Amongst all the trees in the forest, the birch tree is most closely associated with femininity and female-centered rituals. A tall slender white trunk topped with a crown of lush leaves undoubtedly inspired a belief that the birch embodies the traditionally-perceived feminine traits of beauty, youth and fertility. Russian philology scholar Yelena V. Puchkova notes the prevalence of birch trees symbolizing feminine principles, girlhood and purity in numerous rituals and folkloric texts, thus perpetuating the stable comparison between a birch tree and an elegant girl.[28] Indeed, linguist Vladimir N. Vakurov posited that birch trees were symbolic of girlish beauty in the period of feminine life prior to the departure from her parental home.[29] A traditional folk song highlights the connection between the tree and young girls, but also the connotation that the tree itself is a female. It states, "The birch ordered the girls: Come, you girls! Come on, red ones! I will dress myself. I'll put on a dress, everything is green."[30] At the same time, birch tree symbolism signified married women as well, as it symbolizes women's passage from

[27] Borisova, p. 37.
[28] Puchkova, p. 264.
[29] Vakurov, Vladimir, N., 'Belaya berezka nizko k zemle klonitsya' (The White Birch Leans Low to the Ground), *Russkaya Rech'* (Russian Speech) 5 (1986), p. 126.
[30] Vakurov, p. 123.

carefree daughter to the role of mother and wife.[31] This important association between life transitions and ancestors will become explored below with the rituals of Semitskaya Week.

A certain theurgy evolved around the birch tree due to its feminine connection, wherein Eastern Slavic folklore positions birch trees as intercessory agents between girls, their ancestors, and the spirit world. In a context where World Trees connect the cosmos to the underworld, it is logical that Slavic peoples would bestow another tree with similar properties. Many fairy tales and elements of folkloric belief show a deceased young girl or woman transitioning into a birch tree and acting as an intermediary between the living and the spirit world.[32] For example, in the Finnish-Russian fairy tale *The Wonderful Birch*, a 'good wife' was transformed into a black sheep by a witch who subsequently took the shape of the unfortunate woman. The witch demanded that the 'good husband' slaughter the black sheep, not knowing that the couple's daughter knew the secret that her mother was in ovine form. With warning from her daughter, the mother accepted her fate but cautioned her child not to touch any of the meat. A birch tree sprung up where her bones were laid - a birch that acted as a problem solver and gift-giver until the 'good wife' could take her human form again.[33] On the other hand, a local legend from the Rechitsa Polissya area of Belarus provides a more sinister connection to this theme. After a woman murdered her husband, God ordered the woman into a field to 'become like a birch and cry with your hands down.' Birch sap is the tears of this unfortunate woman.[34] One can observe here the relationship between the female character, birch trees, life cycles, and the symbolic (and holistically useful) sap that flows in the early days of spring.

The connection between birch trees and life cycles is more evident when placed into the context of mythological traditions and deities of ancient Slavs. It is necessary to explore these early beliefs as they influenced folk culture, ritual, and the folk calendars used in a contemporary context. A strong example of this female-centered worship is the goddess cult of the natural spiritual force known as the Bereginya — one of the first natural entities to be worshipped by the Slavs. In the 'Sermon by St. Gregory, Found in the Comments, on How the Ancient Nations, When Pagan, Worshipped Idols and Offered Sacrifices to Them, and Continue to Do So Now,' translated into Old Church Slavonic in the eleventh century, the author notes "These Slavs started making offerings to Rod' and Rožanicy before Perun, their god, and before then to the vampires and Beregyni."[35] As a very early divine essence, Bereginya is sometimes mentioned as the source from where

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[31] Kolosova, Valeria B., 'Bereza v slavyanskoy dukhovnoy kul'ture i bytu' (Birch in Slavic Spiritual Culture and Life), *Nauka* (Science) 15 (2015) pp. 33-82; in the electronic format uploaded by author found at www.academia.edu, p. 5.

[32] Borisova, p. 37.

[33] Lang, Andrew. "The Wonderful Birch" in *The Red Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1890), pp. 123-132.

[34] Usacheva, p. 191. Second citation for validation of legend: Piatkevich, 2004 as cited in Kolosova, 'Bereza v slavyanskoy dukhovnoy', p. 6.

all life has sprung. She is known as "the great goddess who gave birth to all things."[36] Despite mentions from the writings of Christian missionaries, few definite characteristics are known about the deity, and national lore consequently shaped how the natural entity is viewed. In Eastern Slavic folklore, Bereginya is represented by a birch tree and is the embodiment of heavenly radiance and light.[37] A noteworthy point of consideration here is that the Proto-Slavic root of *beryoza* (birch) is **berza* which in turn is sourced from the Indo-European base of **bherəĝos*, *bherəĝā* meaning shine, light, or a white colour.[38] As an essence rooted in nature, Bereginya was considered to be an ambivalent force that is associated with both fertility and death as well as being beneficial or harmful to humans.[39] In the case of Bereginya, focus on the root of *берегъ* (bereg") or riverbank has thus compelled some scholars to conclude that Beregyni were water spirits.[40] This is a key point to consider as the water sprites known as the rusalki were said to live on low-hanging birch branches.

At the same time, there is an abundance of Eastern Slavic folklore that prioritizes birch trees in their mystical role as magical protectresses. Modern folklorists and popular accounts prefer to focus on the seeming commonality of *beryoza* and the Russian verb *беречь* (berech'), meaning to keep safe or protect. Certainly, folklore captures numerous ways that birch trees, their bark, or their branches were used as protective charms around Slavic homesteads. It was a general belief across the region that birch branches placed under the roof of a house or left in an attic offered security from bad weather, primarily lightning strikes, and branches left in fields safeguarded against pests.[41] In Ukraine, it was believed that the Trinity tree (a ceremonial birch selected for Rusal'naia Week) had even stronger protective essences, particularly that it could block the entrance of witches and sorcerers into homes and villages.[42]

Whilst these last are acts of protection, birch trees were available to all and this possibility accordingly means that the tree was equally of use to maleficent phantoms and witches in Eastern Slavic folklore. Specific entities that are portrayed in Slavic folklore as mischief-makers, villains, or simply antagonists in fairy tales make use of birch trees. In Slavic mythology, the people believed that 'forest devils' predominantly lived in the tops of birch trees and Leshiye (jokester forest deities or demons charged with the protection

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[35] "Sermon by Saint Gregory, Found in the Comments, on How the Ancient Nations, When Pagan, Worshipped Idols and Offered Sacrifices to Them, and Continue to Do So Now", 4.22.1 in *Sources of Slavic Pre-Christian Religion*, ed. Juan Antonio Álvarez-Pedrosa (Leiden, Brill, 2021), 366.
[36] Avtandil Ağbaba, 'Kul't dereva v mifologii tyurkskikh i slavyanskikh narodov' (Tree Cult in the Mythology of the Turkic and Slavic Peoples), *East European Scientific Journal* 6:70 (2021), p. 35.
[37] Ağbaba, p. 35.
[38] Kolosova, p. 1.
[39] See note 282 in 'Texts in East Old Slavonic' in *Sources of Slavic Pre-Christian Religion*, p. 366.
[40] Ibid.
[41] M. Malokha, 1998, p. 67 as cited in Kolosova, p. 15.
[42] V.K. Sokolova, 1979, p. 209 as citied in Kolosova, p. 13.

of the forest and animals) held much power in Russian birch forests.[43] Additionally, the dominant caricature of a Slavic witch in folklore and fairy tales, Baba Yaga, has a strong connection to birch woodlands while also having a connection to both death and growth. She is typically portrayed as dwelling in a foreboding hut in mysterious, dark birch forests.[44] Once again, it is evident that the feminine folklore related to birch trees unites concepts of light –in this case growth – with darkness and death, as examples include those which centre on the relationship between the trees and the untimely death of women.

Out of all female mythological deities or folk characters, the rusalki are the most connected with birch trees and related rituals in Eastern Slavic folklore and reconstructions of it that emerged between the 18th and 19th centuries. Linda Ivanits' research shares that these spirits could come in many shapes and live in different landscapes: in Smolensk, a peasant reported hearing one (or what they thought to be one) cry in the forest; in northern Russia they are presented as dripping mermaid-like women; and some were even said to be located in fields.[45] In the contemporary context, they are most often depicted or understood to be in their mermaid form. This manifestation connects them to the Bereginya, though extensive study by renowned Russian linguist and ethnographer Dmitry K. Zelenin offered a gloomier explanation. Zelenin posits that these female cacodemons were linked to the concept of the unclean dead or individuals who experienced untimely deaths and did not receive a proper burial. For the most part, those likely to join the astral plane of the rusalki were the unresting souls of deceased young women, girls, or infants.[46] These unhappy souls spent much of their time in aquatic environments, but their otherworldly nature allowed for transcendence into the terrestrial world, where they would visit trees, fields and the homes of ancestors.[47] It is said that birch branches and leaves that hang close to the ground are homes of rusalki.[48] This perception subsequently informed Slavic folk convictions that the birch tree ties the mystical world with the human realm.

Tree veneration in Eastern Slavic folklore contributed to the celebration of seasonal festivals, and the birch reigned supreme as the forest queen in cultural festivities that occurred in spring. Bereshchenye (Берещенье) is an annual folk holiday celebrated on 11 April in the modern New Style calendar and 29 March in the Old Style. It does not have

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[43] Varner, Gary R., *The Mythic Forest, the Green Man, and the Spirit of Nature* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2006), p. 57.
[44] Oleszkiewicz-Peralba, Malgorzata, 'Baba Yaga, the Witch from Slavic Fairy Tales' in *Fierce Feminine Divinities of Eurasia and Latin America: Baba Yaga, Kali, Pombagira, and Santa Muerte* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), p. 17.
[45] Ivanits, Linda, *Russian Folk Belief* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 76.
[46] Dynda, Jiří, 'Rusalki: Anthropology of Time, Death, and Sexuality in Slavic folklore', *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 20:1 (2017) p. 84.
[47] Dynda, p. 84.
[48] Borisova, p. 37.

any particular feminine customs, but rather, it is a day of general reverence towards the birch tree itself.[49] An early spring day was selected as early Slavic peoples believed that the trees awakened from their winter slumber at that time of the year and were ready to share their juices. It is telling just how the early Eastern Slavs were attuned to natural processes in their home environment and development of birch trees. In the Old Russian language, the month of April was known as *березозолъ* (berezozol"), a discernible linguistic association with the tree.[50] The modern Ukrainian language also carries this history as the month of March is known as *березень* (berezen'). In the folk calendar overlaid with religious content from the cult of saints, Bereshchenye is associated with Saint Ivan the Hermit.[51] Villagers would traverse out to the forests and 'listen' to the essence of the birch trees to know whether their sap had begun to drip.[52] Families would stock up on birch sap to create drinks and for medicinal purposes. Buds and branches were collected as traditional healers believed they could be steeped into a healing tea that was offered to the sick.

Rites during the springtime festival of Semitskaya Week or Green Holidays (it is also known Troitsa in the folk calendar) are extremely reliant on birch symbolism. Modern folklorists note that Rusal'naia Week is an old name for the festivities.[53] It is generally understood that this week-long celebration occurs in early June or the week before or after Pentecost - the seventh Sunday after Paskha (Easter).[54] Birch trees were central to the rites and rituals of this week as they are especially lush at this time, are connected to fertility, considered to host deceased souls of ancestors, and their low-hanging branches were the abodes of rusalki. Rusal'naia Week is said to celebrate both the cult of the dead and spring agricultural celebrations, so it ties into discussed birch symbolism.

Zelenin notes that these holidays were linked with the growth of rye in the fields where it is believed the rusalki would sit.[55] He also notes the interesting observation that Belarusian peasants believed that these mermaid-like beings guarded the rye fields almost as spiritual protectresses.[56] This transition from riverbank abode and low hanging birch trees to rye fields illustrates the belief that the unclean dead wandered in the world of the living at this special time. Ukrainian folk beliefs offered the view that God released the dead from the netherworld even as the human world bloomed.[57] Indeed, general

[49] Budur, Natalia V., *Russkiy narodnyy kalendar'* (Russian Folk Calendar) (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2005), p. 190.
[50] Kolosova, p. 3.
[51] Budur, p. 190.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., p. 579.
[54] Dynda, p. 84.
[55] Zelenin, Dmitry K., *Izbrannyye trudy: Ocherki russkoy mifologii: umershiye neyestestvennoyu smert'yu i rusalki* (Selected Works: Essays on Russian Mythology: Those Who Died an Unnatural Death and Rusallki) (Moscow: Indrik, 1995) p. 250.
[56] Zelenin, p. 250.
[57] Ibid.

Eastern Slavic folklore shared that the rusalki were especially active in the realm of mortals during Rusal'naia Week, so it was best to be careful. Rusalki were viewed as dangerous and unclean due to their association with the dead so swimming, building fences, and sowing fields were prohibitions observed.[58] One can easily sense the belief in magic in the Eastern Slavic communities at this time year, especially when the growing season was of such importance for subsistence. The belief that the living world and purgatory could intersect, or at least more strongly so, at specific times of the year presented an additional layer of danger to an already austere existence reliant on nature. In earlier days, Eastern Slavic peoples followed rites and rituals based on myth as a means to placate unseen forces that could tip fortune against them. Now these days are celebratory notes on the folk calendar.

Women and girls were protagonists in the rites associated with birch trees during Rusal'naia Week.[59] At the same time, Vakurov highlights that the birch tree is celebrated as the main heroine of a joyful summer holiday commemorating the transition of spring into the full force of summer.[60] Scholars note that while festivities across regions differed, they all shared birch tree rituals, offices for the dead usually held on Semik Thursday, and ceremonial farewell of the rusalka.[61] Lush natural abundance was celebrated by bringing birch branches into homes as magical decorations as Eastern Slavic peoples were aware of their demon eschewing mystical properties. Young girls ventured out into the forest to a select birch tree to act as the Semik birch for the entirely of the festival; this tree routinely remained in the forest but in some locales, it was brought into the village.[62] Then, the girls would 'curl wreaths' (create wreaths), sing songs about the charm of spring or love, dance the *khorovod* (a circle dance) around the birch, and dress the tree in ribbons and linen towels so that it resembled the beautiful young woman that Eastern Slavic folklore considered it to be.

However, the dressed-up Semik birch was more than just a charmingly adorned intercessional object for ritual, just as birch trees in the woodlands were not mere plants. They were meant to act as an intermediary between the living and netherworld, connecting young girls to their ancestors. Zelenin reports that in the Korochansky District in Belgorod Oblast, girls would weave the tops of two young birches together and say, "Hello godfather and godmother, curled birch!"[63] Further, birch trees played a role in fomenting living-world relationships during the festivities. Ivanits notes that young girls engaged in swearing eternal vows of friendship and sisterhood.[64] Indeed, the practice of кумление (kumleniye) has been pinpointed as an activity that occurred in central Russia,

[58] Ivanits, p. 79.
[59] Borisova, p. 37.
[60] Vakurov, p. 126.
[61] Ivanits, 79.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Zelenin, p. 280.
[64] Ivanits, p. 79.

parts of Ukraine and Belarus as one component of the festivities. Girls would exchange wreaths (in some customs, girls would kiss between wreaths) in front of the birch in the forest, transition their relationship to that of sisters or godmothers, and eat a feast under the birch tree.[65] The practice of kumleniye provided an excellent opportunity for local village girls to strengthen their community relationships so that there were partnerships based on collective experience and womanhood.

The festival celebrating the transition from spring to summer culminated with the farewell to the rusalki who returned to their riverbanks and aquatic homes. Birch trees that budded in spring and showcased their luxurious greenery in summer would soon have to share the forest with trees laden with colourful berries. Other trees would be venerated in other folk holidays over the summer and autumn. However, the rituals of the Green Holidays performed in the presence of birch trees are noteworthy because they denote the association between women and this genus of trees.

Tenets expressed about birch trees, such as their associations with femininity, fertility, and the perception of their role as a perceived *axis mundus* connecting ancestors with their living relatives, are apparent in one of the early manifestations of the rites of spring. The central nature of women to these ceremonies demonstrates the vastly accepted cultural suppositions that birches were feminine, and this notion has been entrenched in natural folklore for generations. Once again, it is evident that birch trees represented a connection between the living and the dead, chiefly among women. Decorations, singing, dancing and feasting are all generally viewed as celebratory, but the inclusion of a somewhat dark entity, the rusalki, highlights there is an element of sadness in these springtime rites. One must recognize that this is the time of year where young women would transition away from one set of qualities inherent in birch symbolism (purity, youth, beauty), and mature into wives and maternal members of their communities.

Рябина - Rowan or Mountain Ash

The rowan or mountain ash is another tree that features prominently in Eastern Slavic folklore as connected to feminine elements. Similar to the birch, the mountain ash is thought to have been bestowed with its gender due to physical characteristics that early people viewed as intrinsically womanlike. A slender trunk topped with lush foliage, like brilliant tresses of hair, and seasonal berries of a bright red hue resembling rosy cheeks inspired Eastern Slavs to believe the mountain ash resembled a young woman. Indeed, Eastern Slavic folklore associates it with youth and beauty.[66] Another view is that the tree was considered feminine due to the strong red colour of its bitter berries.[67] There are also folkloric tales or legends that locate the tree as a symbolic representations of specific girls

[65] Zelenin, p. 279.

[66] Agapkina, Tatyana A., 'Ryabina' (Rowan) in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti: Etnolingvisticheskiy slovar' v 5-ti tomakh - Tom 4. P- C* (Slavic Antiquities: Ethnolinguistic Dictionary in 5 Volumes - Volume 4. P-S), ed. O.V. Belova (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya, 2009), p. 515.

[67] Ibid., p. 515.

or women, but this could simply be the case because the noun was classified as feminine first.[68] An overview of widely known East Slavic anecdotes about the origins of the tree and folk beliefs will demonstrate its connection to feminine essences and superstitions.

There are Eastern Slavic legends about the female-centered nature of the mountain ash, but they involve misfortune falling upon a woman, death, or even the transition to a tree itself. As a consequence, the tree has become a literary symbol in Slavic prose as a way to express yearning, joyless lives, and girls handed over for marriage against their will.[69] There is a general folk belief that individual rowan trees were once young girls who met an untimely death, so it is forbidden to cut such a tree, as to not disturb the soul resting in it. Indeed, in Brest, Belarus, this belief strengthens the taboo into a sin.[70] There is an additional origin story, also sourced in Belarus, that mentions Biblical characters, relating that the mountain ash has red berries because they are the bloody tears that fell from Eve's eyes when she and Adam were expelled from Heaven.[71] Generally, across the Eastern Slavic region, common folkloric elements share a vengeful mother-in-law transforming her daughter-in-law into a rowan. The young husband finds out about the ill-deeds of his mother once he cuts into the tree (as ordered by the matriarch), it spews blood, and the tree explains what had occurred.[72] Tales like this seem to be the source of popular legends that associate the mountain ash with loving couples who ultimately meet an unfortunate fate. Stories such as these are more prominently shared by entertainment and popular websites when rowan-related days mark the folk calendar. For those unfamiliar with the traditional folklore of their regions, tales of unfortunate lovers may be the most prominent due to their widespread dissemination. These tales and the overall belief that the rowan is innately linked to feminine death resulted in a symbolism that is less celebratory than the birch. Rowan is therefore associated with female unhappiness and tragic fate.[73]

Eastern Slavs deemed the rowan an extremely magical tree, but this was not a phenomenon unique to the region. There are parallel beliefs with Finno-Ugric, Baltic, Scandinavian and Germanic peoples.[74] Spiritual practices from this region demonstrate that the relationship with the tree was complex. On one hand, it symbolized female misfortune, but on the other hand, people believed that the mountain ash could revive their health as well as offer protection against dark spirits. This contradiction is visible in

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[68] Agapkina, Tatyana A., 'Simvolika derev'yev v traditsionnoy kul'ture slavyan: ryabina' (Symbolic functions of trees in Slavic traditional culture: rowan) in *Etnobotanika: rasteniya v yazyke i kul'ture* (Ethnobotanica: Plants in Language in Culture) ed. N.N. Kazansky (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2010), p. 239-240.
[69] Ibid., p. 241.
[70] Agapkina, 'Ryabina,' p. 515.
[71] Agapkina, in 'Ryabina' in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti,* p. 515.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Agapkina, 'Simvolika derev'yev-ryabina', p. 242.
[74] Ibid.,, p. 238.

local folk customs concerning whether to have rowan planted near a home. Agapkina notes that it was forbidden to plant the rowan tree near homes in villages due to its association with calamity.[75] However, in the locality of Zaonezhye, which is now part of a district in modern Karelia, villagers believed planting rowan near houses would protect them from demons.[76] Found in the forest, mountain ash was said to be particularly powerful against one problematic forest entity - the Leshy. Meanwhile, in northern Russia, there was a belief that a whip with a wooden handle made of rowan could drive away the woodland prankster.[77] Indeed, it is noted in folk calendars that a branch from a mountain ash protected against the evil eye and could safely guide someone home from the depths of the forest.[78] Whilst the Eastern Slavic territories are renowned for their thick forests, it is peculiar that northerners located in even denser timberland cite the magical protective properties of rowan more than in other locales.

The mountain ash was also a renowned Eastern Slavic folk remedy for toothache and dental issues. Its use was widespread, and rituals varied across communities, where the single commonality was seeking help from the rowan. A ritual occurred in which a suffering person would traverse to the forest, kneel, pray, kiss, chew a piece of rowan bark, and recite the incantation, Рябинушка-матушка, возьми мою болезнь, я никогда тебя не буду есь! (Ryabinushka-matushka, voz'mi moyu bolezn', ya nikogda tebya ne budu yes'! - Rowan-mother, take my illness, I will never eat you!)[79] Two important observations arise from this magic spell: 1. the reference to the mountain ash as a mother 2. the call to it for assistance. Eastern Slavic peoples knew the tree itself could not help them, but rather they sought remedies from the spirit world. In Eastern Slavic mythology, it is generally considered that the mountain ash acted as an intermediary connecting a person to otherworldly forces.[80] This echoes qualities of the birch trees, which were also stated to be feminine and act as a portal to ancestors.

Still, the mountain ash is a sacred tree that received reverence in Eastern Slavic communities and which continues to conjure attention in rituals listed in modern folk calendars. Two key festivities celebrated the rowan, motivating locals to gather and engage in theurgistic rites based on the belief that the mountain ash was an especially magical tree. Рябиновка (Ryabinovka) is celebrated on 25 May in the New Style and 12 May in the Old Style annually. The folk calendar also lists the day under the name Епифан (Epifan).[81] This day is typically viewed as a birthday for rowan trees as early spring is generally the time when they present lush white blossoms to the world. Folk meteorology of the region noted that if blooms arrived later than usual, autumn would linger - Рябина

[75] Agapkina, in 'Ryabina' in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti*, p. 515.
[76] Ibid., p. 518.
[77] Agapkina, in 'Ryabina' in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti*, p. 518.
[78] Budur, p. 275.
[79] Agapkina, 'Simvolika derev'yev-ryabina', p 248.
[80] Ibid., p. 247.
[81] Budur, p. 274.

расцветает позднее обычного - к долгой осени (Ryabina rastsvetayet pozdneye obychnogo - k dolgoy oseni.).[82] Female symbolism is abundant in the superstitions and rituals of this folk holiday.

A commonly known alternate name for the holiday is Красный кафтан (Krasnyy kaftan/red caftan). A *sarafan* or *vyshyvanka* are traditional types of dresses or tunics worn by Eastern Slavic women and girls (though they were once worn by men too) that resemble the loose-fitting shape of a caftan. This is notable because the dress was used a metaphor for the rising sun on the morning of Ryabinovka. There was a mystical belief that if the sun rose on a clear day - 'wearing a red kaftan' - that the summer would be hot, dry, and have a lot of forest fires.[83] In the early morning hours of Ryabinovka, girls would gleefully go to the rowan tree whilst clothed in red sarafans where they would dance and sing. It was there they would ask the tree to protect their home from fires.[84] Other special rituals were conducted by villagers that were not particularly related to women, but to the feminine protective powers of the mountain ash.

The folk calendar informs that the mountain ash has grander festivities later in the year. It is generally accepted that the first Рябинник (Ryabinnik) occurs on 27 August in the Old Style and 9 September in the New Style.[85] This folk holiday is followed by the second (and final of the autumn festivities related to rowan) outing known as Пётр и Павел – Рябинники (Peter and Paul Ryabinniki) celebrated on 23 September in the New Style and 10 September in the Old Style. Folk Orthodoxy associates the day with Saints Peter and Paul, Bishops of Nicaea.[86] Ryabinnik was celebrated in a similar way like Ryabinovka; the key difference rests in the fact that, by this time of season, the blooms have matured into berries, the trees are heavy with red clusters of their typically bitter fruits, and they paint the landscape with flashes of red by September. A common Eastern Slavic folk omen advises that strawberries were consumed in late June, but once autumn and the day of Peter arrived, it is time to eat rowan berries — С Петрова дня летнего ешь землянику, а с осеннего — рябину! (S Petrova dnya letnego yesh' zemlyaniku, a s osennego — ryabinu!)[87]

Those familiar with the fruit will have encountered the common phenomenon across the Northern Hemisphere that rowan berries become sweeter after the first frosts. Eastern Slavic people ventured out into the forests to collect berries and branches, while the

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[82] Reshetnikov, Nikolay I., *Russkiy narodnyy kalendar': Obychai obryady imena* (Russian Folk Calendar: Customs, Rites, Names) (Moscow: Olma Press, 2005), p. 597.
[83] Budur, p. 275.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., p. 429. See also Reshetnikov, p. 293.
[86] Reshetnikov, p. 318.
[87] GISMeteo, 'Ryabina otmechayet svoi imeniny' (Rowan Celebrates Its Name Day), 23 September 2012, accessed on 10 September 2022. https://www.gismeteo.ru/news/sobytiya/ryabina-otmechaet-svoi-imeniny/ (Used as source to demonstrate commonly used proverb.)

branches, heavy with fruit, were tied into bunches to be hung under the roofs of houses, barns and gates as amulets.[88] This practice falls in line with the belief that the tree has mystical protective properties; placing its foliage in abodes where family and animals live meant they would be shielded from misfortune and dark forces. Women transformed the rowanberry crop into delicious delicacies. Most prominently, they made jam, kvass, and liquors.[89] Pies and cakes feature on the menu — there are numerous recipes for рябиновый пирог (ryabinovyy pirog/rowanberry pie) that could only be made at this time of year. While women collected the berries, decorated their homes and created charms, there was a caveat against the over-collection of rowan fruits. It was advised that most of the bright red bounty be left for forest animals, particularly small birds, for their winter sustenance or one would face bad luck.

The mythology around the origins of the mountain ash firmly demonstrate that it is considered to be a female tree in Eastern Slavic folklore. At the same time, its association with femininity is not especially light, but rather tragic and unfortunate. Associations with blood, sadness, and death symbolically act as metaphors for the life transitions of women marked by rituals and rites. People are expected to have a balanced relationship with the rowan — they can take her gifts of berries, but in moderation, or face misfortune. At the same time, folklore around this tree links feminine essences with protection and this is intrinsically a sign of power. Another aspect of mythical omnipotence is that the rowan was considered to be an agent between the living world and the spiritual realm, prompting Eastern Slavs to approach it to beseech favours. Rowan may have a mixed reputation in terms of whether to keep it nearby or left in the forest, but it is indeed a feminine tree of remarkable note in folklore.

Липа - Linden

There are numerous reasons why early Slavs considered the linden to be a feminine tree. Firstly, unlike the hard, durable wood from a traditionally masculine oak tree, linden has particularly soft wood. Secondly, linden blossoms are used to create honey - a sweet substance correlated with fertility since ancient times. Heart-shaped leaves, a slender trunk and a lush crown of foliage support the notion that the outward appearance of the tree is in line with other trees the Eastern Slavic peoples classified as feminine. However, the association of the tree with women and femininity is not entirely positive. Ukrainian legends posit that linden is a tree associated with unhappiness and the sharp tongues of women because God gave it the power to absorb hexes meant for men that originated from angry women. As a means to withstand these female-uttered curses, linden trees developed a gnarled tree trunk, and thus lost their beauty.[90] So, this particular tree was

[88] Reshetnikov, p. 318.

[89] Budur, p. 429-430.

[90] Agapkina, Tatyana and Valeria V. Usacheva, 'Lipa' (Linden) in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti: Etnolingvisticheskiy slovar' v 5-ti tomakh - Tom 3. K-П)* (Slavic Antiquities: Ethnolinguistic Dictionary in 5 Volumes - Volume 3. K-P) ed. Nikita Tolstoy, (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya, 2004), p. 113.

categorized as feminine, but it did not carry the connotations of beauty or youth like the birch or the rowan.

Folkloric tales about the origins of linden offer insight into its connection to women. One tale involves a peasant girl who was violated and murdered in the forest. A linden tree grew out of her knee and villagers venerated this mystical tree; however, a local priest disagreed with the idolization of the tree and went to chop it down. Blood spilled at the first cut of the axe and the priest immediately begged for forgiveness.[91] In Belarus, the origin legend about the magic tree is Christian-based. Local myth offers that the linden is a holy tree because the Mother of God rested upon it during a transitory journey to Heaven.[92] Alternatively, it is also believed that the linden sheltered the Mother of God and Jesus during the Flight into Egypt.[93] Whilst not of Eastern Slavic ethnicity, Borisova mentions a folk song of the Chuvash people of the Volga-Ural region of Siberia that shares, "The old linden standing on the edge of the forest, do not chop it, what if this is our mother? The young linden tree standing in the middle of the forest, do not chop it, what if this is our elder sister?"[94] Other regional fables are not abundant with female imagery (though the tree has the pronoun of she), but rather with bear symbolism. The fairy tales Откуда взялись медведи (Otkuda vzyalis' medvedi) or От чего пошли медведи (Ot chego poshli medvedi/Where Bears Came From) and Медведь – липовая нога (Medved' – lipovaya noga/Linden Foot Bear) display this other important connection.

The pliability of linden wood contributed to the folk belief that the tree acted as a maternal figure. Slavic peoples, inside and outside of the territories under discussion, perceived the tree to act as a mothering figure in the forest because it provided raw materials for many necessities of life. Linden wood was used for construction materials; furniture pieces such as tables; dishware and utensils; rope; footwear; beehives frames, and numerous church goods.[95] These unique traits led villagers to consider linden trees to be a sort of 'holy, kind, and generally friendly to humans' genus of the plant world.[96]

Nonetheless, contradictions in the perception of softness are also apparent in Eastern Slavic folklore. Soft and supple qualities were deemed desirable in terms of construction of some goods, but, also, they were viewed as signs of weakness. The linden came to represent people, objects, or lifestyles that were "short lived, weak, and poor."[97] Agapkina shares a humorous, sarcastic quote from the Perm region of Russia: "I became

[91] Agapkina and Usacheva, 'Lipa', in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti,* p. 113.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Borisova, p. 39.
[95]Agapkina, Tatyana A., 'Simvolika derev'yev v traditsionnoy kul'ture slavyan: lipa' (Symbolic functions of trees in Slavic traditional culture: linden), *Slavyanskiy al'manakh* (Slavic Almanac) 3-4 (2018), p. 364.
[96] Ibid., p. 360.

rich: instead of patent leather boots, I put on linden ones," meaning that the person still remained in poverty.[98] Whilst it is reasonable for soft wood to be viewed this way, this is a labyrinthine perspective in terms of the gender of the tree. It can be acknowledged that dated cultural perceptions of women viewed their perceived softness as physical weakness in comparison to men. However, the connection between the linden and the Mother of God seemingly overrides any such connotations because she is deemed an extremely powerful figure in Orthodoxy and Catholicism.

Eastern Slavic folklore is abundant with examples of the linden as a magical tree from the perspective of folk Orthodox Christianity, in its role as an intermediary for health benefits, as protection against lightning, and in its ability to repel evil forces. For example, it was a common practice to build churches or install crosses in spots where old linden trees once stood, just as these holy trees were often planted near churches and temples.[99] These activities align with the folk belief that the linden was the holiest of all tree species. As well, an attitude that the tree was connected to heavenly powers and was considered friendly to humans motivated Slavic peoples to seek help to soothe specific maladies from the linden. Rather than using parts of the tree medicinally, people sought help from the living object spiritually. It was a commonly held folk belief that local healers transferred diseases from the afflicted to linden trees.[100] Two prominent folk medicine examples from the Polissya area of Ukraine featured circling the tree: children suffering from infirmities, primarily insomnia, were carried around the tree and women seeking to rid themselves of infertility walked circles around an old linden.[101]

A tree that was regarded as holy as well as useful for health and construction purposes ultimately meant that Slavic peoples preferred to have linden in their close environments; since they felt the tree brought happiness, they held no fears about planting it near their homes.[102] Planting this particular species of tree near homes also provided a secondary blessing - protection from lightning. It was a widely held folk belief that lightning did not strike linden, so it was placed near buildings and people were unafraid to hide under it during a thunderstorm.[103] Whilst not sourced from the territories in eastern Europe, there is a Southern Slavic legend from Slovenia wherein the linden tree once asked God to direct all the lighting at her as a way to prevent lightning strikes on nearby churches.[104] These examples portray a tree that while certainly revered for its helpful and protective properties as relating to matters experienced personally (ailments) or seen in the physical

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[97] Agapkina, Tatyana A., *Derev'ya v slavyanskoy narodnoy traditsii: Ocherki* (Trees in Slavic Folk Tradition: Essays) (Moscow: Indrik, 2019), p. 127.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Agapkina and Usacheva, 'Lipa', in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti*,p. 112.
[100] Agapkina and Usacheva, 'Lipa' in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti,* p. 114.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., p. 112.
[103] Borisova, p. 38.
[104] Agapkina, 'Simvolika derev'yev- lipa', p. 361.

world (location of churches and lightning) was also considered advantageous in combating perilous circumstances in the realm of the unseen.

Eastern Slavic peoples sought protection from unfortunate circumstances or devious spirits through a variety of rituals reliant on linden trees and branches. Whilst it is generally associated with the Mother of God, there was a time that it was revered by sorcerers and warlocks due to its protective properties, particularly related to lightning.[105] Further, myth advised people that rusalki rode on a bare linden bough.[106] Somewhere in the development of Eastern Slavic folklore, this familiar use by witches and wizards transitioned to a status where linden repelled them. Villagers used branches and crafted distinct amulets from linden to counter enchantments from witches, rusalki, and other demons. More specifically, advice that spanned generations advised listeners that witches lost their ability to shapeshift into werewolves once they were firmly whacked with a linden branch, and a woman could be released from spiritual possession in the same manner.[107] Additionally, it was a Russian folk custom to hang linden crosses on the neck of a person tormented by evil spirits.[108] Anecdotes from Chernihiv Polesie in Ukraine advised the wary to leave linden branches and twigs scattered on the floors of dwellings to prevent the infiltration of the rusalki.[109]

Other mystical uses of linden branches include being placed on a bed to protect an individual from longing for their deceased spouse, especially if they visited in the form of someone from the living dead; defence of women from evil spirits; hallucinations that took the form of a fiery serpent, and the safeguarding of farm animals as they grazed.[110] There is even a belief about the use of linden around livestock: in the Starobilsk area of Ukraine, hitting cattle with a linden branch was prohibited based on the notion that the animals would die.[111] Indeed, these examples of mystical belief demonstrate that the linden was most certainly viewed as talismanic - a means to counter the perceived influence of entities that could cause misfortune. It is only in the development of folkloric belief that the religious aspects of the tree could be so tightly wound with its use as magical protection.

Linden played an important role in late spring and early summer traditional festivities, but the folk religious events that occurred in early autumn are most peculiar. Polish ethnographer Kazimierz Moszynski, who conducted much research in the region in the early twentieth century, observed that on the first week of September, villagers brought

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[105] Agapkina and Usacheva, 'Lipa', in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti* p. 112.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Agapkina, 'Simvolika derev'yev- lipa', p. 362-363.
[108] Borisova, pg. 38.
[109] Agapkina and Usacheva, 'Lipa', in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti* p. 114.
[110] Agapkina, 'Simvolika derev'yev- lipa', p. 363.
[111] Agapkina and Usacheva, 'Lipa', in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti* p. 114.

gifts and candles to a linden tree and go on to kiss it and bow as though it was a shrine.[112] Based on this knowledge and timing, and in consultation with the folk calendar, it seems feasible that the Slavs venerated the tree due to a specific holiday that falls into this general timeframe. On 8 September (Old Style), the Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God is celebrated. At this time of the year, Eastern Slavic peoples readied to welcome the new season of autumn by preparing a large feast, indulging in a the celebration of the birth of such a holy woman.[113] The close association between the linden tree and the Mother of God undoubtedly urged Slavic peoples to venerate her in their folk Christian practices as they believed this powerful maternal figure sat in the lush branches of the tree. Religious folk belief combined with lifestyles so innately tied to nature inspired Slavic peoples to believe that when they venerated a particular linden, they were pleading for the intercessory power of the Mother of God.

Concluding Thoughts

Pre-Christian Eastern Slavic peoples were not exceptional in their system of tree veneration and renowned Slavicists opine that the practice was gained from and nuanced alongside neighbouring ethnicities. Nonetheless, it is apparent that trees feature prominently in Eastern Slavic mythology and folklore, with the understanding that trees represented people or acted as intermediaries to other spiritual realms. Trees were believed to be the home of ancestors, the swings of unclean spirits, and mythical protectors of important holy figures. This is an important point of reflection in terms of gender categorization and the purpose of rituals.

Whilst grammatical categorization may have played an early role in the symbolic gender of trees, traditional characteristics thought to be masculine or feminine applied to specific genera of trees, shaping how they were worshipped. In many cases, myth taught that certain sorts of trees were once female human beings or even offered residence for female divinities. This is evident in the mythical origin stories relayed above about birch, rowan, and linden trees. Further, perceptions of tree gender determined who engaged in specific rituals or who would be best served from the performance of certain rites. Folk practices, whether in celebratory holidays or medicinal purposes, typically associated feminine trees with female deities or their mortal sisters. Observations of particular actors in the Eastern Slavic folk calendar holidays reveal young girls were at the centre of Semitskaya Week with its mysticism heavily reliant on birch branches, women asked for protection from wildfires from the seemingly feminine rowan, and the Mother of God was figuratively visited on a linden on an early September day.

[112] Agapkina, *Derev'ya v slavyanskoy narodnoy*, p. 116.
[113] Reshetnikov, p. 316.

In terms of folk celebrations, but not canonical religion, holidays like Bereshchenye, Ryabinovka, Peter and Paul Ryabinniki and the Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God may not be widely commemorated anymore in Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia, but even their continued remembrance reveals fleeting glimmers of bygone reliance on the agricultural and natural calendars so important to life in the past. Additionally, these folk holidays offer contemporary audiences a chance to delve into ancient folkloric belief around trees - particularly the strong feminine essences connected to birch, rowan, and linden. Just as feminine trees in Eastern Slavic mythology acted as intercessory agents to the living world and the netherworld, folk holidays focused on trees today offer opportunities to explore national myth and feminine rituals of the past in the modern age.

About the Author

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The Wish of the Mother: Re-writing Desire into Sacred Narratives in *Yaśodharāvata* and the *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*

PHUSATHI LIYANAARACHCHI

Abstract

Buddhist hagiographies are laden with connotations of a symbolic 'matricide' where Māyā, the Buddha's mother, has to pass away in order to fulfill a necessary pre-condition for Buddhahood. Cast as a supporting figure in Buddhist Canonical literature, Māyā is written away, de-sexed, and sanctified as Māyādevaputta *(the mother god) in the name of her early death. As* Jāti, *or birth, is codified in Buddhism as a part of saṃsāric existence, the figure of the mother, while highly venerated is also associated with suffering and attachment. Yet, the use of terms such as* Amā Mā̆ṇi *(Mother of Deathlessness) to refer to the enlightened one points towards an ambiguous connection between the Buddha and the maternal. Recent studies have similarly understood and decoded this ambivalence while suggesting possibilities of understanding maternal love as a space of pure loving-kindness. Therefore, in this essay, I wish to read the domain of dreams and the maternal in* Yaśodharāvata *and the* Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya, *two folk-poems written during the Kandyan literary period as possible sites for further exploration of this ambiguity. The texts in question are of oral origin, passed down from one woman to another, especially during funerary practices. What is particularly interesting about both these texts is the folk poet's rendering of dreams and wishes of the Bodhisattva's mother that precede the main narratives, indicating the space of conception in light of a maternal unconscious. I wish to read this alongside the trope of the recurring maternal wish and its associated metaphors in Sinhalese Buddhism to render the*

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significance of the mother towards the Buddha's quest for nirvāṇa. Therefore, by re-reading Buddhahood as a realization of a maternal wish, I suggest that the alternative narrative possibilities for feminine sexuality and desire that emerge within the folk resist the erasure and subsumption of the matrix into greater traditions.

Keywords: Women in Buddhism, maternal wish, Māyā, folk poetry

Résumé

L'hagiographie bouddhiste est chargée de nombreuses connotations d'un 'matricide' symbolique quand Māyā, la mère du Bouddha, doit mourir pour répondre à une pré-condition nécessaire à la réalisation du Bouddha. Investie d'un rôle de soutien dan la littérature bouddhiste canonique, Māyā is effacée de l'histoire, désexualisée puis sanctifiée comme Māyādevaputta *(la mère du divin) au nom de sa mort prématurée. Comme* Jāti, *la naissance, est codifiée dans le Bouddhisme comme faisant partie de l'existence saṃsārique, la figure de la mère bien que hautement vénérée, est aussi associée à la souffrance et à l'attachement. Cependant, l'utilisation de termes comme* Amā Māṇi *(Mère de l'absence de la mort) en référence à l'Illuminé, dirige l'attention vers une ambiguïté de la connection entre le Bouddha et le maternel. Des études récentes ont à cet égard compris et décodé cette ambivalence, tout en suggérant la possibilité de comprendre l'amour maternel, comme un espace de pure bienveillance-aimante. Deux poèmes populaires composés durant la période littéraire Kandyan, soit le* Yaśodharāvata *et le* Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya, *nous offrent des sites favorables pour l'exploration des relations entre le Bouddha et le maternel. Le but de cet essai est, en particulier, d'étudier ce thème à partir des références au maternel qui se trouvent dans les rêves cités dans les poèmes en question. Les textes en question sont d'origine orale, transmis d'une femme à l'autre, surtout durant les rituels funéraires. Ce qui est particulièrement intéressant dans ces deux textes, c'est la présentation par les poètes populaires des rêves et des désirs de la mère du Bouddha, des thèmes qui précèdent la narration principale, et qui traite de l'espace de la conception à la lumière d'un inconscient maternal. Nous lirons ces thèmes en relation avec le thème du vœu maternel récurrent, avec les métaphores qui y sont associées, pour approcher de l'influence de la figure maternelle dans la quête du Nirvana par le Bouddha.En lisant la réalisation du Bouddha comme la réalisation d'un vœu maternel, je suggère que la possibilités de narratifs alternatifs pour la sexualité et le désir féminins, qui emerge dans le populaire, pourrait résister à l'effacement de la matrice dans les grands traditions religieuses.*

Mot-clés : Femmes en Bouddhisme, vœu maternel, Māyā, poésie populaire

Introduction: The Mother Question

A Double Bind: Tracing Motherhood in the Buddhist Canon

Mothers, being the progenitors of the saṃsāric cycle, are often thought to be dismissible from the Buddhist canon. This claim is further justified on the grounds that her womb gives birth (*jāti*), becoming the vessel that carries the very seed of continuous existence. As birth brings attachment, and attachment suffering, motherhood itself is sometimes thought to be negative and of no soteriological value in furthering one's quest. This may be further supported by canonical indications, where the post-natal death of the mother is the pre-condition for a Bodhisattva birth. However, what I term the canonical matricide of Māyā[1] does not limit itself to the physical death of the Buddha's mother but also extends to the erasure of her presence and significance from Buddhist hagiographies. As Liz Wilson has pointed out, one could speculate that this is owed to the canonical notion of spirituality being dominated by masculine ideals instead of the feminine, where women are written as aids of saṃsāra[2]— a 'man-trap'.[3] Moreover, the literal mother was seldom associated with spirituality and was rather associated with stunted spiritual development drawing on the fact that the suffering ascribed to motherhood often made a female birth undesirable.[4] In such instances, the move from saṃsāra to nirvāna[5] is also articulated as a "rejection of the mother and an identification with the father."[6]

Marie Françoise Guédon problematizes such modes of reading, stating that asking questions about the status of women in societies assumes that cultures are already structured in a masculine logic and that women are only a second thought, a secondary aspect of culture.[7] It follows that tracing only the strands of canonical misogyny and injustice, while opening our eyes to the limitations of patriarchal structures, may have closed them to certain fruitful ambiguities in the depiction of women which may provide points of identification with the mother and by extension, matriculture. In an attempt to avoid drawing identity and definition for women from larger patriarchal structures, she directs us towards non-dominant meaning-making processes such as folk imagination.[8] I

[1] Māyā (also known as Mahāmāyā) is the mother of the Gautama Buddha. It is said that she must pass away within a week of giving birth as the womb which had borne a Buddha shall not bear another mortal being.
[2] The cycle of life laden with suffering due to life, death, and rebirth in Buddhist thought.
[3] Liz Wilson, *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurines of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 70.
[4] Rita Gross. "Feminism, Lay Buddhism, and the Future of Buddhism", in *Buddhist Women Across Culture: Realizations,* ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo *(*New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 283.
[5] Sanskrit for 'blowing out' or being extinguished. A concept in Buddhism that represents the freedom from the endless cycle of saṃsāra and therefore, suffering.
[6] Reiko Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27. In her book, Ohnuma attempts to take up motherhood as a lingering tie which cannot be broken even if one gives up other worldly ties. However, she does so with regard to Gōtami and other canonical maternal-like women while considering Māyā as only serving the function of the birth-giver.
[7] Marie Françoise Guédon, "Introduction,", *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies,* 01, no. 1 (2020): 3-7; my paraphrase.
[8] Ibid.

not only concur that such spaces are capable of nurturing and transmitting various cultural and religious imagery to write alternative, secular narratives within the sacred but trust Rowlatt's supposition that the notion of matriculture aims to support the expression of women, by taking their statements seriously while considering the "female world as primary."[9] To take the female world as primary, we must look into intuitive, unconscious, and unexpected strands of transmission that cultures perform in order to sustain matricultures. Accordingly, my role as a reader here is informed by Karen Derris's notion of seeking out a "hermeneutic which, while accounting for the historical contexts of the Buddhist texts, also acknowledges these texts as a part of living traditions with futures that may be shaped by [and through] interpretation."[10]

In an attempt to explore the under-explored ambiguous attitude toward motherhood, I turn to Reiko Ohnuma's *Ties that Bind:*

> Buddhism had a complex and ambivalent relationship with mothers and motherhood—symbolically, affectively, and institutionally. Symbolically, motherhood was a double-edged sword, sometimes extolled as the most appropriate symbol for Buddhahood itself, and sometimes denigrated as the most paradigmatic manifestation possible of the attachment to the world that keeps all benighted beings trapped within the realm of rebirth.[11]

Given such opacities, that at times take motherhood as the 'most appropriate symbol for Buddhahood', and as 'a trap' at other times, it would be most productive to keep our interpretative possibilities open by not delimiting or conflating the maternal and the feminine, but by reading for the possibility of the feminine to emerge through the domain of the mother. This double bind of motherhood also seems to be extant across Buddhist traditions. For instance, in her work on the ideological landscape surrounding women in Mahāyāna Buddhism, Diana Paul identifies two recurrent themes that emerge in attitudes towards the feminine: firstly, the perception that the "feminine is mysterious, sensual, destructive, elusive and closer to nature" and secondly, "that the feminine is wise, maternal, creative, gentle and compassionate."[12] Though these two strands also recur in Theravāda Buddhism to a great extent, it does not promote an integrative view that identifies the masculine and feminine as two harmonizing facets of a singular spirit.[13] Furthermore, while there has been ample attention given to Mahāyāna Buddhism, which was considered more democratic and acceptable towards women, little has been said about the maternal in Theravāda and its lived realities in South Asia, particularly Sri Lanka.

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[9] Linnéa Rowlatt, "Blind: The Western Gaze at Matriculture, Historically," *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 01, no. 1 (2020): 16.
[10] Karen Derris, "Interpreting Buddhist Representations of Motherhood and Mothering," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 62.
[11] Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind*, 4
[12] Diana Y. Paul, "Introduction", in *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahāyāna Tradition*, (London: University of California Press,1985), xxiv-xxv.
[13] In the Mahāyāna conception the masculine corresponds to wisdom and the feminine, to compassion. See Diana Y. Paul.

Therefore, in this essay, by locating the transmission of a maternal metaphor in popular imagination, I trace the literary consciousness of the Buddha's mother through the folk laments in question. In doing so, I wish to argue that while the canonical matricide of Māyā performs an erasure of her physical body from Buddhist hagiographies, the folk poet's rendering of demands and desire through the tropes of wishes and dreams develop a psychological connection to the Bodhisattva, thereby establishing her undeniable presence in the Buddha's story. This will further allow us to re-read her depiction in light of a matricultural point of view where Buddhahood is articulated as a wish-fulfillment brought about by the mother.

'Amā Mā̆ṇi': Mother as Metaphor

In Sri Lankan Buddhism, the mother is frequently in apposition to the Buddha. This is taken up by Richard Gombrich in his essay 'Feminine Elements in Sri Lankan Buddhism,' where he discusses the juxtaposition of *Budu amma* (Buddha-mother) as a metaphor that deserves further investigation. He does so with reference to quotidian coinages and usages, where the term is used generously and interchangeably to refer to both one's mother as well as the Buddha.[14]

While my inquiry began with an attempt to trace this relation in the Buddhist canon, I was struck by the realization that perhaps I was looking in the wrong place. The prevalent version of this maternal metaphor has made its way into popular consciousness to such an extent that a popular Sinhala song meant to be sung by a father retorts *ammāvarun pamaṇada matu buduvannē*? (Are only mothers capable of attaining Buddhahood someday?).[15] This rendering of the mother in Sinhalese popular imagination is remarkable given the perceived exclusion of women from the soteriological path and the notion that one cannot attain nirvana during a female birth.

This can be further illustrated through the maternal metaphor that recurs within Sinhalese Buddhism in the *Matṛ Upamāva*, a text which is particularly used in a ritual communal context called *yugāsana bana* (the twin-seat sermon) where two Buddhist monks will take part in a *dhamma* recitation upon a *dhammāsana*.[16] *Mātā iva Buddho yi*, *Khīram iva Dhammo yā*, *Khīrapayika dhārakā viya sangho yi*; the text goes on further to equate the Buddha to a mother, the Doctrine to milk, and Buddhist monks to children who nourish themselves on the Buddha's milk.[17] What is stimulating about this maternal metaphor is the fact that it goes into lengthy descriptions of the things a mother would do for her children in order to construct the spiritual equivalent of a secular mother

[14] Richard Gombrich, "Feminine Elements in Sinhalese Buddhism", *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 16 (1972): 68; Gombrich relates this connection to the notion of prediction in Buddhism where in certain Buddhist texts such as the 'Mātupōsaka Jātaka', the mother is seen wishing Buddhahood on behalf of her son.

[15] T.M. Jayaratne 'Amma Sandaki,' YouTube. September 30, 2021, Song, 03:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KojDgYygA7s

[16] Richard Gombrich, "Feminine Elements in Sinhalese Buddhism", *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 16 (1972): 70.

[17] Ibid, 70-73.

which sits within the role of the Buddha. Functioning as a comparison, the maternal metaphor also juxtaposes the selfless nature of a secular mother who goes out of her way for her children with a Buddha's carefully cultivated and perfected compassion. This can be further observed in the coinage *Amā Māṇi* (the mother of deathlessness) another name for the Buddha that holds him in the position of the mother. Reversing the metaphor, a popular household coinage *gedara budun ammā* (a mother is the Buddha of a home) presents to us another juxtaposition that hails the mother in the Buddha's position within the domestic sphere. These strands of transmission of the maternal metaphor not only complicate the attitude towards motherhood in Buddhist thought but may hold alternative implications that undo the notion of motherhood as an archetype of attachment that hinders a woman's ability to enter into the soteriological path.[18] Therefore, in order to understand the origins of this maternal metaphor, we should trace the psychological significance of the relationship between the Buddha and his mother.

Tracing Matricultures: The Folk Appeal of Canonical Mothers

Barbara Watson Andaya credits the success of Theravāda Buddhism in South Asia to its appeal to women. She further goes on to state that what nurtures this particular appeal is the fact that it relies on a maternal metaphor that recurs in Buddhist imagination, thereby allowing secular women to relate to it irrespective of social standing.[19] While her study is based on Early Theravāda Buddhism, the popularity that the two folk poems in question have gained among the common village women in Ceylon[20] speaks to a folk tradition that ensures the woman-to-woman transmission of these laments. Prominent Sinhala scholars have also underscored their significance by stating that while *Yaśodharāvata* relates the "Buddha's story in a manner that would be of interest to women,"[21] *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya* reflects "the harsh realities faced in the domestic life of one that leaves in search of a higher cause."[22] Such engagements point towards how the laments in question deviate from previous canonical preoccupations with spiritual concerns to accommodate secular themes such as humane aspects of grief, mourning, and the loss of filial relationships that would be of more relevance to lay Buddhists. Therefore, it is not an overstatement to posit that while these post-canonical narratives may be at "the margins of those valued by scholars [they] offer us rich resources for thinking about the representation of mothering [and women] in Buddhist literary traditions."[23] Engelmajer upholds that this kind of interpretative approach will not only legitimize motherhood by contesting patriarchal structures but will also reveal "aspects of women's authentic and lived experience."[24]

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[18] See Ohnuma, "A Mother's Heart is Tender", *Ties that Bind*, 11-35

[19] Barbara Watson Andaya, "Localising the Universal: Women, Motherhood and the Appeal of Early Theravāda Buddhism," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2002): 16.

[20] Charles E. Godakumbura, *Sinhalese Literature* (Colombo: Department of Cultural Affairs, Sri Lanka, 1976), 280.

[21] Ibid.

[22] *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*, ed. Sucharitha Gamlath (Colombo: Godage, 1990), ii; my translation.

[23] Karen Derris, "Interpreting Buddhist Representations of Motherhood and Mothering," 65.

[24] Pascale F. Engelmajer, ""Like a Mother Her Only Child": Mothering in the Pāli Canon," *Open Theology* 6 (2020): 91.

To develop my position further, it is important to introduce my primary texts: said to have their oral origins somewhere in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries during the Kandyan Literary period, *Yaśodharāvata* and *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya* are two popular folk laments by unidentified authors. The former, which recounts the story of Yaśodharā[25] after Siddhārtha's *mahābhinikmana*, the great renunciation,[26] is one hundred and thirty verses in length,[27] while the latter, written in nine hundred and seventy-five verses, narrates the *Vessantara Jātaka*, the penultimate birth of the Bodhisattva which relates his resolve towards the perfection of alms. While both of these laments were later published in the early nineteenth century with the advent of letterpress printing, their early transmission mostly owed to their appeal to women. There is further speculation that "in all these laments, the narrative persona, if not the actual author of the poem, is a woman."[28] Whether or not these speculations hold truth, these two laments have also gained popularity within Sinhala funerary practices and were sung during communal gatherings by women who came together to work. It is therefore abundantly clear that the poems may have had some impact to not only structure the lives of Sinhalese women but also to shape a literary consciousness of female figures who have been seemingly disregarded or cast aside in the Buddhist canon. Accordingly, I explicate the ways in which the dream sequences and the verses on motherhood in the two narrative poems may offer poetic renditions of the Bodhisattva's mother as Māyā in *Yasodharāvata* and as Phusatī in *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*, which may speak to the significance and the symbolic value of the Bodhisattva's mother towards his quest for nirvāṇa.

The Domain of the Maternal

The Mother's Desire

Mothers and sons are at the heart of psychoanalytic thought. Freud postulates that this very first relationship that forms between an infant and his mother will have an impact on all object relations that follows in his life.[29] Therefore, it is not implausible for us to speculate a psychological connection between one of the most sanctified sons in history and his mother. Elucidating on such psychological connections, Sudhir Kakar argues that the maternal-feminine may be far more central in the Indian psyche, especially in relation to the mother goddess:

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[25] Siddhārtha's wife in the Buddhist tradition.

[26] The *mahābhinikmana* marks the moment of Siddhārtha's renunciation of worldly pleasures, including his newborn son and his wife on behalf of his quest for enlightenment.

[27] For the purpose of this study I will focus on excerpts from the manuscript, which Ranjini Obeyesekere identifies as '*Yaśodharāvata* B' or 'Y (B).' For further information on Yaśodharāvata see: *Yaśodharā, The Wife of the Bōdhisattva:The Sinhala* Yaśodharāvata *and the Sinhala* Yaśodharāpadānaya (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009).

[28] Ranjini Obeyesekere, *Yaśodharā, Yaśodharā, The Wife of the Bōdhisattva: The Sinhala* Yaśodharāvata *and the Sinhala* Yaśodharāpadānaya (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 19.

[29] Sigmund Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipal Complex", *The Ego and the Id and Other Works: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1961), 173-179.

> [T]he hegemonic narrative of Hindu culture as far as male development is concerned is neither that of Freud's Oedipus nor that of Christianity's Adam. One of the more dominant narratives of this culture is that of Devi, the great goddess, especially in her manifold expressions as mother in the inner world of the Hindu son. In India at least, a primary task of psychoanalysis, the science of imagination or even 'the science of illusion' — Mayalogy — is to grapple with Mahamaya, 'The Great Illusion' as the goddess is so called.[30]

This perhaps offers insight into our societal preoccupations with our mothers. For instance, given the close contact between Hinduism and Buddhism, it is highly probable that this sense of the great goddess as the Great Illusion transmitted into Buddhist imagination, at least as its namesake, Māyā.[31] Therefore, perhaps, the real Great Illusion is the one in which we are lamenting the ephemeral presence of Māyā in the canon, reading her solely as a birth-giver and distracted from the possibilities of tracing her literary consciousness that spans generations and temporalities through Jataka stories, eventually emerging only as an integral element of her son's inner world.

Accordingly, to map her desire onto later folk renditions we must first visit her depiction as an aspirant in an origin story that dates back to the time of the Vipassi Buddha, ninety-one *kappas*[32] before the time of Gautama,[33] where it is said that Māyā was born as the elder of the two daughters of King Bandhuma. Upon receiving an invaluable piece of sandalwood and a golden wreath, the King gifted the sandalwood to his elder daughter and the wreath to his younger daughter. The eldest powdered the wood and took it in a golden casket as an offering to the Buddha, who rubbed some on his body; the rest was scattered by her in his residence. Seeing the sight of the Buddha's golden-hued body, Māyā is said to have been inspired by a desire to be the mother of such a being.[34] This wish explains Māyā's characterization in the *Lalitavistara* as *pūrvābhilaṣinī* (the one who has wished or aspired from before).[35] The golden-hued body, a sign of a highly meritorious being, is also one of the thirty-two signs of greatness. Thus, we can construe that what inspired Māyā's wish of conception was the greatness and nobleness ascribed to a Buddha. Born alongside the Bodhisattva, in his many births, it is said that Māyā also

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[30] Sudhir Kakar, "The Maternal-Feminine in Indian Psychoanalysis" in *The Essential Writings of Sudhir Kakar* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 183.
[31] Mahāmāyā, also referred to as Devi, is known as the primordial Goddess or Divine Mother. She is the deification of all wealth, strength, beauty, fame, knowledge and renunciation. It is said that Pārvati is also a reincarnation of hers.
[32] *Kappa* also known as *Kalpa* is a long period of time in Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies. It is translated as *aeon*.
[33] Gunapala Malalasekera, 'Māyā, Mahāmāyā', *Buddhist Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* http://www.palikanon.com/english/ pali_names/dic_idx.html
[34] Ibid.
[35] *Lalitavistara,* trans. Rajendralala Mitra (Culcutta: Asiatic Society,1882), 43.

practiced the 'perfections'[36] or the ten qualities leading to soteriological development for one hundred thousand *kappas*:

> සොළස අසංකෙයියක් කප් නිබඳේ
> එසඳ අසංකෙයියක් හෝ නිබඳේ
> පැතුවයි එබිසව සඳමහ නිරිඳේ
> බුදුවන උත්තම කෙනෙකුන් නිබඳේ
>
> Continuously for sixteen infinite eons
> Continuously even in infinite terms
> Wished that queen oh King Sanda Maha
> For a noble one who would become a Buddha[37]

In the verses preceding the narrative of the Bodhisattva Vessantara's story in *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*, we encounter a wish articulated by the mother born as Phusati in the penultimate birth of the Bodhisattva. The folk poet emphasizes the mother's perseverance, accentuating the fact that she has been keeping up this resolve for 'sixteen infinite eons' in order to mother a Buddha. Through each lifetime, Phusati labors towards fulfilling perfections towards her ultimate wish to give birth to 'a noble one who would become a Buddha,' ascertaining her in a position that surpasses that of the mere birth-giver. Instead, her maternal wish locates her not only as the creator of her own trajectory but also as a patron of the Buddha's quest. Through this, the folk poet also establishes the Buddha's mother in a role capable of pursuing the soteriological path on her own terms.

The earliest detailed accounts of this mother can be found in the *Lalitavistara*, where the narrative finds the exalted one himself relating the story of his conception, birth, and his life. Seated in his palace in Tusita heaven the Bodhisattva contemplates four great objects: the time, continent, district, and the clan in which he would be born.[38] In later traditions, the mother is also added to this consideration amounting to five great objects. While contemplating the clan, the devas who are gathered around the Bodhisattva go on to specify thirty-two essential qualities of the noble lady into whose womb the next coming Bodhisattva must descend:

> She should be (1) well known, (2) lovely, (3) free from defect, (4) of good birth, (5) of good lineage, (6) of great beauty, (7) of good name, (8) of good length and breadth, (10) childless, (11) charitable, (12) of smiling face, (13) clever, (14) frank, (15) gentle, (16) proficient, (17) well informed, (18) learned, (19) unintriguing, (20) deceitless, (21) unirascible, (22) unenvious, (23) uncovetous,

[36] These are the perfections of: *dāna* (alms), *sīla* (morality), *nekkhamma* (renunciation), *paññā* (wisdom), *viriya* (endurance), *khanti* (patience), *sacca* (truthfulness), *adhitthāna* (resolution), *metta* (loving-kindness) and *upekkhā* (equanimity). See Gunapala Malalasekera, 'Māyā, Mahāmāyā', *Buddhist Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* for more details.
[37] *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*, Verse 26. All translations from *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya* by the author.
[38] *Lalitavistara*, trans. Rajendralala Mitra (Culcutta: Asiatic Society,1882), 37.

(24) steady, (25) unwavering, (26) unscrullious, (27) full of aroma of patience, (28) modest, (29) free from passion, envy, and folly, (30) inheriting no defect from the mother's side, (31) faithful to her marriage vow and (32) well-endowed with noble qualities in every part of her person.[39]

The above description of the thirty-two qualities of Māyā seems to establish her as an extraordinary, great, and noble woman akin to how the prince Siddhartha is described in relation to thirty-two auspicious signs that mark his greatness. While these thirty-two conditions may be read as unrealistic demands which are meant to constrict Māyā's sexuality and individuality as a woman at first glance, one should keep in mind that she is no ordinary woman. Having fulfilled *pāramī* (perfections) for eons, Māyā is an embodiment of the perfect human nature of a disciplined, mindful being who nurtures inner qualities to give birth to a being who will attain spiritual awakening. This is perhaps why she is not held as an ideal for secular mothers. Instead, reading about a Māyā who had inculcated discipline over her thoughts and actions may offer insight into how one will be able to accommodate motherhood within the Buddhist soteriological path itself and to understand the conditions which make a mother-Buddha metaphor possible. In light of my assertion, it is particularly interesting that some of her qualities, such as unwavering, free from passion, envy, and folly, patient, and uncovetous, reflect that of an ascetic and are analogous to certain qualities of the Buddha.

For our discussion, it is fruitful to view these qualities of the mother vis-á-vis Phusatī's demands, which are articulated in the verses before the Bodhisattva's conception in the *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*. Having completed her time as a female deity in the Tāvatiṃsa heaven, Śakra invites her to return to the human world. While she has fulfilled perfections towards becoming a Bodhisattva's mother, having to leave the luxuries of heaven behind, she is taken back at the prospect of leaving and is seen articulating ten demands. These wishes also function as incentives that motivate her re-entrance to the human world. My selection of verses is intended to delineate the range of feminine desires articulated through her wishes:

එන කල් නරලොව ගොස් උපදින්ටයි
මන කල් සඳමහ රජුට වෙසෙන්ටයි
සැමකල් ඉසකෙස් නර නොදකින්ටයි
මෙමකල් පැතුවා මට සිදුවෙන්ටයි

Till I come back [here] I want to be born in the human world
And to be with the King Sandamaha to my heart's content
And may my hair never see a strand of silver
May all these that I have wished for happen to me[40]

දසන් කැකුළු කොඳ වැල සෙ සැදෙන් ටයි
මූණ එ පුන්සඳ සේ බබළන් ටයි

[39] Ibid, Verse 42.
[40] *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*, Verse 34.

නුවණ ද තේජස් ඔද වැඩි වෙන් ටයි
මෙමා පැතූ දේ මට සිදු වෙන් ටයි

May my teeth take the form of blossoming jasmines
May [my] face glow like the full moon
May my wisdom and my majesty know no bounds
May all these that I have wished for happen to me[41]

While these demands are also taken up in *Butsaraṇa* within a single paragraph,[42] the folk poet goes into detail allocating a narrative space that articulates the mother as an individual (*mama*) and articulating her wishes as things she wishes upon herself (*maṭa*, to me). Upon closer reading, we can see that her wishes concern multiple domains. Some of them directly reference her appearance, identifying characteristics of supreme beauty: golden skin, hair, and teeth, while others mark her expected social disposition: lineage, clan, husband, etc. Engagement with these demands offers remarkable insight into the social parameters that determined a woman's station.

However, instead of discontinuing this quest at what one would identify as women's concerns, the folk poet goes on to articulate her desires in detail. For instance, the නුවණ ද තේජස් (wisdom and majesty) that she requests in the previously cited poem ties in with her wishes to bring about kindness through royal diplomacy and to play an active part in governance:

රාජ පරාජය කුල ඇතිවෙන් ටයි
ඒ රජ ගෙට අල්ලා ගෙන යන් ටයි
ඒ රජ මා කී බස් ගිවිසන් ටයි
ඒ රජ නො මරා ඔවුන් අරින් ටයි

May kings be defeated in front [of my clan]
May that king be captured and taken into our house
May the king be negotiated by my words
May that king then be given the chance to live[43]

In the above verse, we see Phusatī wishing for the ability to sway the minds of men, මා කී බස් ගිවිසන්ටයි (negotiated by [her] words). Through this, she wishes to direct them away from thoughts of war and murder. This wish not only ascribes a benevolence akin to that of the Buddha in this aspirant Bodhisattva mother but also builds towards a spiritual connection with the son that she desires:

ඇස් ඉස් මස් ලේ ඉල්ලුව දන් දෙන

[41] Ibid., Verse 36.
[42] Vidyācakravarti, *Butsaraṇa* (Colombo: National Library and Documentation Services, 2019), 260; my translation. An early Sinhala canonical text which recounts the *navaguna* (nine qualities) of the Buddha.
[43] *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*, Verse 39.

සිත් ලෙස යදියන් සසරින් ගොඩලන
පුන්සඳ මෙන් රැව මුළු ලොව බබළන
පුත් රැවනක් පතනෙමි තෙද ගරුවන

[One who] gives eyes, [one's] head, bone or blood if asked
[One who] escorts the beggars of saṃsāra out of it,
to the heart's content
[One who] glows and lights up the world like the full moon
I wish for a son revered and majestic.[44]

පතනෙමි (I wish) attempts to capture all the four wishes within the above verse as things for which the future Bodhisattva-mother hopes. In the Jātaka story, these demands are precisely what shapes the character of Vessantara, her Bodhisattva son, cast in his penultimate birth to fulfill the perfection of alms in order to be born in his final lifetime to attain enlightenment. Therefore, the verses that articulate the mother's wishes can be read also as a prelude that sets up the larger narrative, to be read in light of them. As the reader encounters the later events of Vessantara's fulfillment of the perfection of *dānā* (alms) they are reminded of the voice of the mother, who remains a specter that supports his spiritual quest. Likewise, as examined above, the Buddha's mother is portrayed in the folk poem as one with awareness of the concept of enlightenment and is privy to certain knowledge that only the awakened one is privy to. This follows that the woman in question is mother to the Buddha not only because the Buddha or the devas choose her as the ideal mother, but because she has willingly worked towards becoming an epitome of perfection.

Furthermore, a recurring line in *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*, repeats the same wish in different forms, see above: මෙමා පැතූ දේ මට සිදුවෙන් ටයි (may what I wished for happen to me).[45] This seems to give particular prominence to the wish of the mother. The recurrence suggests that the maternal wish ought to be treated in its own right. It alludes to the fact that part of the Buddha's *adhiṭṭhāna* (perseverance) and *viriya* (strength) may have found an ally in his mother's unwavering wish and resolve. The well-wishing mother's blessing manifests as a drive and a motive that shapes the Bodhisattva's trajectory.

While the sections I elucidated above reveal strands of the mother's wish before the conception of the Bodhisattva, a further symbolic connection can be mapped through conception by looking towards the domain of dreams within the folk lament that reveals the mother's wishes.

Of Dreams and Desire: Interpreting the Wish of the Mother

In Buddhist literature, dreams are a common trope that indicate child-bearing and can also be understood as a site of prophecy. Within such narratives, deciphering such dreams with the help of interpreters often reveals the nature of the infant and the life

[44] Ibid., 41.
[45] *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*, Verse 58 (see page 87, note 41).

they will lead in the future. Given the symbolic significance of dreams, our exploration of the dream sequences in the two folk poems might benefit from Sigmund Freud's renowned conception of dreams as unconscious wish fulfillment.[46] Through this, he expounds on two types of content within dreams: manifest and latent. The manifest content is the remembered dream, which is often distorted and does not depict the wish itself. Here, the wish may be projected onto different symbols and objects. However, Freud also suggests that the interpretation of such dreams may make the latent content — the underlying meaning — of the wish apparent. Therefore, in reading these dreams closely I wish to treat them as a space that oscillates between manifest and latent narrative content. By rendering the sexually charged imagery within dreams in place of the act of conception, the folk poet draws attention to particularly secular wishes and desires of women that can only be articulated within the folk literary domain.

Before proceeding to the dreams in the folk poem, we must contextualize them by exploring how the renowned dream of a white elephant is depicted in *Buddhacarita*, the earliest known biography of the Buddha:

> Free from sin, then, she produced the fruit
> of her womb,
> as knowledge does, when united with trance.
>
> Before she conceived, she saw in a dream
> a white elephant king
> entering her body, yet she did not
> thereby feel any pain.
>
> Maya, then, the queen of that god-like king,
> her womb bearing the glory of his line,
> by her purity freed from delusion,
> sorrow and fatigue, set her mind
> on visiting that faultless grove.[47]

One can also notice here that there is no mention of the Bodhisattva's descent from Tusita heaven as in *Lalitavistara*, where he spends his time contemplating his particular choices in front of an assembly of gods.[48] Instead, the Buddha's conception is depicted as devoid of sin and related without explicitly sexual connotation with a symbol often associated with purity and nobility: the white elephant.

To delve further into the domain of dreams it is particularly stimulating to follow Vanessa Sasson's conception of the womb as a perfect metaphor for the cosmos, which "predicts

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[46] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon, 1965), 10.
[47] Ashvagosha, *Life of the Buddha*, trans. Patrick Olivelle (New York: New York University Press and JJC Foundation, 2008), 3.
[48] *Lalitavistara*, trans. Rajendralala Mitra (Culcutta: Asiatic Society,1882), 73-88.

of something far greater to come."[49] Following suit, *Yaśodharāvata* relates a sequence of dreams following conception providing insight leading up to the birth of Siddhārtha within the span of eleven stanzas,[50] where each dream carries symbols of prophetic value. While the dream of the white elephant is more common and popular in Buddhist literature, the rest of the dreams can be read as an attempt of the folk poet to carve out a space for Māyā and to articulate her character given her later physical erasure following the son's birth.

Yaśodharāvata records the dream of the white elephant as follows:

සුදු සක ලෙසට ඇත් පැටියෙක් විත් යහ නේ
සුදු සොඬ ටිකෙන් මගෙ බඩ පිරිමදිති අ නේ
සුදු යම් දෙයක් සිදු වෙයි මම දුටු සී නේ
සුදසුන් නිරිඳුනේ මොකදැ යි ඔය සී නේ

Like a white conch an infant tusker has arrived at my bed
And with a bit of his white trunk, he caresses my belly
There is something pure occurring in this dream I saw
Oh! King Suddhodana, what is this dream?[51]

The folk poet's rendering of this dream is charged with a doxa of contesting desires: the soteriological desire to give birth to a Buddha is at odds with the sexual aspect of conception as understood and depicted by the folk poet. For instance, in the above poem, the infant tusker making physical contact with Māyā's body, සුදු සොඬ ටිකෙන් මගෙ බඩ පිරිමදිති (caresses my belly with a bit of white trunk), has connotations of the buildup to a sexual act. What's interesting here is the way the poem ends by asking King Suddhōdana to decipher the dream, implicating him in Māyā's pleasure. While the verse sustains a certain purity through the repetition of the word සුදු (white), in contrast to the earlier depiction of the dream in *Buddhacarita* — which establishes that the conception was 'free from sin — the folk poet may attempt to emphasize purity in order to naturalize the sexual act and introduce some form of sacrality into the sexual domain of conception.

Consider the following dreams in this sequence:

රන් යහනේ සැතපෙන කල බිසවුන් ට
පුන් සඳ මඩල අහසින් ඒ යහන් පි ට
රන් කඳ ලෙසට වැඩියා සුදොවුන් ළහ ට
තුන ජාමෙට පෙනුණා සඳ මඩල ම ට

[49] Vanessa R. Sasson,"'A Womb with a View: The Buddha's Final Fetal Experience," in *Imagining the Fetus the Unborn in Myth, Religion, and Culture,* ed. Vanessa R Sasson and Jane Marie Law, (USA: Oxford University Press, 2008), 56.
[50] *Yaśodharāvata*, ed. Sucharitha Gamlath (Colombo: Godage, 1995), Verses 10-21. All translations from *Yaśodharāvata* by the author.
[51] Ibid., Verse 15.

As the queen lay upon her golden bed
The full moon presided over the bedstead
The golden-hued Suddhōdana approached her
In the deepest hour of the night, I saw the moon[52]

The first poem in the dream sequence depicts the romantic and sensuous imagery of the queen lying in her bed, bathed in moonlight, while the king approaches her. The folk poet's subtle rendition of Māyā facing upwards towards the moon juxtaposes Suddhōdana's golden-hued body with moonlight, placing her within the sexual act and building towards the sexual union of the two parental figures. In doing so, the folk poet imparts some form of previously absent sexual awareness and control to Māyā who is often sacralized and devoid of desire in her depictions.

දණක් පමණ මල් අතුරපු දිව යහ නේ
පමණක් බිසව සැතපෙන කල දුටු සීනේ
මැණිකක් දකින කොට ගැබ ඇතුලට වැදුණේ
මොන මොන දෙයක් දෝ නොදැනෙයි සුවාමිනේ

Atop a divine bed laden with flowers, knee-deep
The queen alone, was asleep when she saw this dream
As she dreamt of a precious stone, something entered her womb
I cannot decipher what oh! what it is my lord?[53]

රිදී යහනේ සැතපෙන කල බිසවුන් ට
පිරී දෙතන කිරි එරිලා කරඩුව ට
රිදී කඳකි නයි පැටියෙකි දරණ ව ට
නැරිය දරු සීන පෙනුණා බිසවුන් ට

As the queen slept atop a bed made of silver
Her breasts brimming with milk to the casket nipples
Appeared a silver log, around which a young serpent coiled
And so, the queen saw a sure dream about conception[54]

Once again, the poetic imagery marked by the words ගැබ ඇතුළට වැදුණේ (entered into the womb) and රිදී කඳකි නයි පැටියෙකි දෙරණ වට (a young serpent coiled around a silver trunk) is drawn from a repertoire of corporeal sexual imagery. However, the folk poet isolates Māyā on her bed, පමණක් බිසව සැතපෙන කල (she alone was asleep), to reinstate her claim to the domain of conception and pleasure. In expressing her desire through dreams, the folk poet accounts for the subtleties of women's desire and pleasure which are not given prominence in canonical writing, where the sexual act is often indicated through the image of *keli* or sport and described in terms of the domain of men.

[52] Ibid., Verse 10.
[53] Ibid., Verse 11.
[54] Ibid., Verse 21.

For our discussion then, we could imagine that the latent function of these dreams points towards articulating a domain of feminine desire that considers conception and the sexual act that leads to it as auspicious and sacred events. Thus, instead of performing the mere function of the prophecy of the prince's conception,[55] the dreams go on to articulate the domain of the maternal. In this articulation, we are also able to trace the growing psychological connection between the Bodhisattva and the mother.

Another function of this dream sequence is the portrayal of Māyā's role as the Buddha's mother as an active choice that is brought forth by the symbolic options within the dreams:

මහසෙන් රැස් ව කුඩකොඩි ගෙන වට කර ට
අහසින් ඇවිත් රන් තරුවක් දෙරණ පිට
විගසින් ඇහිඳ ගත්තෙමි අමයුරු ලෙසට
සිනෙන් තරුව ගිලුණා මගෙ ගැබ තුළ ට

Crowds have gathered carrying parasols and flags
From the sky, a golden star has come onto Earth
Hastily, I picked it up, as if it were *amruta*[56]
In the dream, the star sank into my womb[57]

This particular dream also functions as a premonition of the later very public birth depicted in canonical hagiographies and foretells the life of the Buddha as one who leads people out of saṃsāra. Interestingly, in the dream, it is Māyā who picks up the fallen star, once again evocative of her wish to give birth to a Bodhisattva. One could even go on to say that given the context, this dream develops on the metaphor of the Bodhisattva's descent from heaven by juxtaposing the act of conception as a mutual wish of the son and the mother. This posits the possibility to view Buddhahood and the quest for nirvāna as one emerging out of the mother's wish and followed by the son's resolve rather than a solitary resolve of the son.

The Mother and Son: A Dyad

Unified Cravings of the Mother and Son: Dola

To further elucidate the psychological connection between mother and son, and to understand motherhood as a "symbol of becoming,"[58] I think it is necessary to delve into the domain of *dola* or craving which is given significance during pregnancy. These specific

[55] The interpretation of these dreams are also included in the poem (Verses 16-17). They prophesy the birth of Siddhārtha.

[56] A divine nectar known to immortalize its consumers. It should also be noted that *amruta* is also an adjective often used to describe the everlasting truth that the Buddha sought and preached.

[57] *Yaśodharāvata,* Verse 19.

[58] Celine Grünhagen, "The Female Body in early Buddhist Literature," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis*, Vol. 23 (2011): (100-114).

and often uncontrollable longings are said to intensify during pregnancy and are thought of as an expression of impending childbirth. Owing to the biological connection, the mother is said to be ventriloquizing the infant's craving. Therefore, tracing the depiction of *dola* in literature is significant for our discussion as it may reveal strands of a psychological connection between the Bodhisattva and his mother.

Durt draws on two possible derivations of the term *dohada*: 1) *dvi-hṛd*, double-hearted (as the mother is housing a second heart in her womb, and 2) *dohida* (from *doha*, milk, to mean milky secretion). A third etymological possibility points towards *dauhrda* (suffering) which also corresponds to *duka* in Sinhala. This third meaning is picked up in Sinhalese Buddhism, which refers to this condition as *dola duka*; the term *can* be traced back to Pali, where an expectant mother is referred to as *dohalinī*.[59] As the roots of the word *Dohala* also denote thirst, craving, or greed much like the word *taṇhā*,[60] this negative connotation seems to have been carried into Sinhala by identifying the pregnant mother herself as an embodiment of this very nature.

Through his field research in Laggala, Obeyesekere explicates that the common attitude towards *dola duka* suggests that it is a perverse appetite that should be satisfied at all costs, as its denial may have further detrimental implications on the infant.[61] At times, *dola* cravings of the mother were also deemed ill-intended towards the father and are associated with despicable and feigned cravings which reflect destructive intentions. Given these ambiguous connotations, the folk poet's renditions of benevolent *dolas* in relation to two maternal figures point towards the possibility of unification of the mother and the son through their resolves. This can be further understood in the coinage 'two-hearted' which alludes to mutual nourishment, which I read as both biological as well as spiritual. It follows that the interpretation of *dola* cravings that arise in the Bodhisattva's mother during gestation may give us insight into how this maternal metaphor may be extended further in light of a joint quest. Durt further points out that *dohada* can be sublimated into generosities which may be connected to the embryo the mother is bearing:

> Most commonly the woman expresses only one *dohada* but it can happen that her desires multiply. This multiplicity of desires occurs most often when desires are sublimated. This is seen, for instance, in the stories of mothers of prestigious sons: Māyā and the Buddha, Phusatī, and Vessantara.[62]

This is helpful in the analysis of our poems, given that they draw on sublimated *dola* cravings concerning both Māyā and Phusatī. Durt makes the point that Phusatī is perpetually addicted to gifting (*sadā dānaratā*) as a suggestion that foretells the

[59] Herbert Durt, "The Pregnancy of Māyā: the Five Uncontrollable Longings (Dohada)," *Journal of International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 5 (2002): 46
[60] Derivative of the Sanskrit *tṛ́ṣṇā* refers to the physical or mental thirst, greed or longing.
[61] Gananath Obeyesekere, "Pregnancy Cravings (Dola-Duka) in Relation to Social Structure and Personality in a Sinhalese Village," *American Anthropologist* 65, 2 (1963): 323. http://www.jstor.org/stable/667447.
[62] Durt, 53.

generosity which will characterize her son Vessantara.[63] However, in my reading of the text, I suggest that the folk poet appears to offer an alternative reading of *dola*, depicting the mother as one who is already fond of giving alms through her request for a son who would be inclined to give.[64] Likewise, her wish seems to predestine the nature of the son in such a way that her *dola* now appears as her own wish fulfilment and the son as an executor of her legacy of giving. One could speculate that the folk poet's articulations are deliberate, especially given that they explore the limits and the possibilities of motherhood within the domain of *dola*, where women are given a legitimate space to speak of their desire.

Phusatī's tendency for giving alms is further depicted in her prosperous altruism, as she is said to be spending up to six hundred thousand a day for many days, until she fulfills her longing to give:

වෙසෙස වෙමින් ලද එ බිසව් සිරිසර
පිය සනි දන් සහ දෙවෙනි පහන් කර
දවස සලක්ෂය දන වියදම් කර
මෙලෙස දිනෙන් දින දන් දී දොළ හැර

The very image of prosperity, the queen took efforts to
Give alms in areas that were destitute, and alm-less
Thus, spending as much as six hundred thousand every day
She gave alms daily till her craving to give passed[65]

There is a certain ambiguity in the term *dola* here which also lends itself to be interpreted as Phusatī's own wish. A possible explanation could be that given both mother and son have resolved to fulfil perfections towards Buddhahood (the mother towards bearing a Buddha and the son towards being a Buddha), pregnancy — through mutual dependence — is unifying their resolves by articulating these wishes as one and the same.

A similar craving is carried on through the mother in *Yasodharāvata*:

මායා බිසවුන්ට දොළදුක් හට ගැනි ලා
දයා සිතින් සැම යදියෝ රැස් කර ලා
කියා සැම තැනම වාසල් කරවා ලා
ගියා බිසව් දන්සල දැක සතුටු වෙ ලා

A craving's awoken in Queen Māyā
With a compassionate mind, she gathered beggars
She ordered and erected shelters throughout the kingdom

[63] Ibid., 54
[64] *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*, Verse 41 (See this quatrain, translated and analyzed on page 88, note 44).
[65] Ibid, Verse 62.

Then she left after rejoicing at the sight of the alms-house[66]

The folk poet's utilization of the structure of *dola* to articulate the benevolent and meritorious nature of the mother is noteworthy. Similarly, in early Buddhist biographies such as the *Lalitavistara*, Māyā requests Suddhōdana (the Bodhisattva's father) to liberate prisoners, bestow various alms on people, steer clear of disputes and punishments, and to propagate peace of mind and friendship. In doing so, she asks him whether he "look[s] upon all the crowd as [his] only son."[67] A version of this metaphor can be traced to the *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta* which preaches about propagating loving-kindness towards all beings in the world just as a mother loves her only child.[68]

Through such depictions of Phusatī and Māyā, which suggest that the mothers are intuitively aware of the being they are about to bring forth, the folk poet further reifies the mother-son dyad. This translates into the folk poet's advocacy of the significance of the mother in relation to her contribution to the Buddha's soteriological path, as well as identifying Māyā's course of motherhood as a soteriological path she carves out for herself, especially since being the mother of a Buddha is no easy task and involves letting go of life and, therefore, the infant seven days following birth. This calls for a necessary recognition of the mother's presence. It renders us new insight with which to read about the birth of the Buddha, which takes place in public sight and is not limited to a private birth house. In the two folk poems, the decision to travel to the citadel and the Sal park[69] is portrayed as a *dola* of the mother, this time a craving which can be interpreted as one for recognition:

දොළ උපතක් විය නුවර වඩින්ටත්
සැල කරපුව මහ වේ සරසන්ටත්

A craving arose to visit the citadel
Ask for the streets to be decorated[70]

සල් උයනට යන්ට දොළක් උනිය මට
රන් රිදියෙන් සරසන්නේ උයන වට

A craving arose to visit the Sal Grove
In and around the park is being decorated in Silver and Gold[71]

සැල කරපුව in the first excerpt above can be translated into 'ask' or 'send for,' indicating that the special provision is written as a specific demand made by Māyā before she sets

[66] *Yaśodharāvata,* Verse 20.
[67] *Lalitavistara,* trans. Rajendralala Mitra (Culcutta: Asiatic Society,1882), 77.
[68] *Karaniya Metta Sutta: The Buddha's Words on Loving-Kindness*, Trans: The Amaravati Sangha. https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.1.08.amar.html
[69] 'Sal Grove' refers to a garden of *Shorea robusta* trees.
[70] *Purāṇa Vessantara Jātaka Kāvya*, Verse 64.
[71] *Yaśodharāvata*, Verse 27.

out on her walk towards the citadel. This depiction is particularly significant as it is customary for a pregnant daughter to return to her parents' house in order to deliver the child in India and Sri Lanka (and possibly other South Asian countries). Yet the articulation of this decision as a craving of the mother and the fact that she delivers the blessed infant in plain sight of gods and men speaks for the culmination of the mother's wish to give birth to a Buddha. The roads and the parks are decorated in honor of the queen's visit and the birth is a celebration of the exalted mother as much as it is of the noble son.

Thus, the folk poet rewrites the domain of *dola*, often categorized as a site for uncontrollable and wicked cravings that arise in pregnant women with an underlying ill-wish towards the husband, into a space of soteriological desire and as a domain in which a mother articulates her own wishes pertaining to the infant that she is carrying. This, combined with the fact that not much has been said of the Buddha's father, points one towards the importance of the maternal and furthers my claim that there is a fundamental spiritual connection between the Buddha and his mother which cannot and should not be reduced to the biological connection.

Concluding Thoughts: Imagining the Mother as Prophet, The Mother as Buddha.

I have discussed and delineated above how the folk poems are written in a manner that not only gives a sense of fecundity to the sacred, de-sexed Buddha-mother but also claims for her the ability to make choices. We must keep these facts in mind as we revisit Māyā's depiction in light of our understanding of this matricultural strand which recurs within the site of dreams and cravings in the folk poems as the wish of the mother.

We have on many occasions heard of the Buddha's mother as a sanctified being, often devoid of desire. Yet, I turn to *Lalitavistara* and a representation of Māyā which, while noting that it was limited to her husband, does describe her as having desired him (perhaps at the onset of marriage)[72] in order to suggest that the Buddha-mother was in fact not devoid of desire but was aware of it and the role it plays in soteriological ambition. Then her choice of the path of celibacy can be read as a renunciation, which draws an undeniable parallel between her path and the Bodhisattva's own path. I believe that this gives us insight into how one could understand the desire for non-desire, the cessation of all desires, as an aspiration and a resolve much like the one that the Buddha's own mother expressed. Here I believe that, unlike its counterpart, this desire is not directed towards possessing an object but towards reaching an object in order to relinquish or renounce it — much like the Buddha's mother does on the seventh day after giving birth. This naturally brings us to the fact that the term 'desire' here should be understood in relation to Māyā's ambition and resolve, a form of wish which may be better articulated in terms of the Pali words *āsimsana* (which embodies a wish and well-wishing) or *panidhāna* (wish or resolve).

[72] *Lalitavistara*, trans. Rajendralala Mitra (Culcutta: Asiatic Society,1882), 43.

To tie up our final strands of thought together, we must turn to a recurrent jātaka in the Sinhalese repertoire misidentified as the *Mātuposaka Jātaka*.[73] It relates the story of a son who swam across oceans with his mother on his back in order to save her life. This is also the subject of an extant folk-poem, *Manō Pranidhānaye Sivpada*, which relates this very same story in the folk repertoire. The poem is said to go on about the merit acquired by the mother in the act of mothering by drawing on Mahāmāyā's rebirth in heaven.[74] Being a Buddhist myself, I am reminded of how I first came across this story during my first year in Primary school among the pages of a government textbook given for the purpose of learning Buddhism. My most significant memory of this story follows the utterance of the saved mother, මගේ පුතා බුදුවේවා! (May my son attain Buddhahood!), through which to date I have thought of a connection between Māyā and the Buddha.

What then is the significance of this wish originating from the Buddha's mother? Classical canonical texts deem it a requirement for this *pranidhāna* [resolution] to take place in the presence of a Buddha, to be immediately followed by his *vivaraṇa* (prediction) of success. Moreover, there is just [the] one prediction which is said to be imparted on a Bodhisattva by a Buddha.[75] Accordingly, we too are told that the Gautama Buddha received his *vivaraṇa* to continue his career as a Bodhisattva from a Buddha named Dīpamkara during a lifetime born as an ascetic named Sumedha. However, the story with the mother that I drew on above is said to date backwards beyond Sumedha,[76] complicating our understanding of *vivaraṇa* by establishing the mother's blessing itself as preceding that of a Buddha. Gombrich also states that this line of narrative, which gives prominence to the mother, only occurs in the non-canonical texts and that "it isn't clear when the role of the mother promoting Buddhahood is made explicit."[77] Yet the very existence of this narrative, re-christened as the *Mātuposaka Jātaka*, is crucial for our project as it may reveal the origin of our culture's preoccupation with the Buddha-Mother.

Given the canonical silencing of Māyā, while it may seem extraordinary to think about the suggestion that the Bodhisattva's career originated with his mother's blessing, the popular imagination that seems to depict this vital role of her wish explicitly through demands and cravings paves a distinctive path to trace the maternal. What's most interesting here is the fact that the vow to attain Buddhahood is taken in front of one's mother instead of a Buddha. Given this, we can even go on to further even imagine the mother in the position of a Buddha as her resolve unites with her son's resolve within the category of enlightenment. This further renders the unification of the mother-son dyad in the term *Amā-Māṇi*, as the mother in the popular imagination is present as a consciousness that strives through a wish towards her son's quest for Buddhahood until its final resolution. In such a case, we could conclude that the Buddha's mother is indeed, deathless.

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[73] No. 455 of the Jātaka Stories, relates the story of the Bodhisatta born as an elephant looking after his blind mother. Here too it is said that Mahāmāyā was the mother elephant.
[74] Gombrich, "Feminine Elements," 79.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid, 81

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Daughter of the Goddess, Sister of Man. Matriarchal Patterns in International Fairy Tales

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Abstract

My way of analysing fairy tales is based on a new method using structures instead of isolated motifs; these guide us to a new understanding of this important folk tradition. It can be shown that the general matriarchal patterns of the goddess and her partner, the holy king or heros *which abounds in international mythology, are also to be found in international fairy tales. This reveals these folklore traditions as hidden matriarchal myths, made anonymous and passed on through millennia. The matriarchal structures in fairy tales are demonstrated here using some examples which emphasize the relationship of the goddess to the woman and of the woman to the man. At the end, it will be shown how the matriarchal patterns in fairy tales have been systematically transformed into patriarchal patterns.*

Keywords: matriarchy, fairy tales, Goddess structure, *heros* structure

Résumé

Mon analyse des contes de fée se base sur une nouvelle méthode considérant les structures plutôt que des motifs isolés, ce qui nous guide vers une compréhension nouvelle de cette tradition. On peut démontrer que les schémas matriarcaux unissant la déesse et son partenaire, le roi divin ou héros, *qui abondent dans la mythologie du monde, sont aussi présents dans les contes du*

* This article presents some ideas abridged from a chapter in my early book *The Goddess and her* Heros, published in 1980 in German. In 1995, this book was translated and published in English; it is now re-published and available on my website (www.goettner-abendroth.de). The density of material in this article is due to the concentration needed to bring a long and detailed chapter of the book dedicated to a matriarchal analysis of international fairy tales into just some pages.

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monde. Les traditions folkloriques se révèlent alors comme des mythes matriarcaux, devenus anonymes au cours des millénaires. Nous démontrons la présence des schémas matriarcaux dans les contes à l'aide de plusieurs exemples qui mettent l'accent sur la relation de la déesse avec la femme, et celle de la femme avec l'homme. Par la suite, nous verrons comment les schémas matriarcaux des contes de fée ont été systématiquement transformés en schémas patriarcaux.

Mots-clés: matriarcat, conte de fée, la déesse, la structure *héros*

Introduction: Matriarchal Mythology

My knowledge of the matriarchal cultural epoch expanded steadily through continued study and extensive travel until, finally, I recorded it in a major work entitled *Matriarchal Societies.*[1] But the implications of this knowledge developed in my mind much earlier and I decided many years ago to begin with one segment: matriarchal mythology, since its symbolic image-systems clearly illuminate matriarchal worldview and values. It also seemed appropriate to begin with the spirituality of these cultures. This led to the publication of my first book in this field: *The Goddess and Her* Heros. It includes an analysis of mythology from India *via* Persia, Egypt and the Mediterranean area until it arrived in Europe through excavating the oldest layers, the matriarchal ones, of diverse mythological systems that have been written down much later.

The range of this historical survey accounts for the profound impact that the epoch of matriarchal societies had on the subsequent patriarchal societies which destroyed or usurped them. If we reintegrate knowledge of the matriarchal epoch into our own historical perspective, then we can easily discern remnants of those matriarchal patterns, mythical symbols, and ideals in later times. They become tangible as a sort of 'matriarchal opposition' at work within socially and geographically marginalized groups and sub-cultures. This is especially true for the spreading of the international, so-called 'fairy tales,' which are hidden matriarchal myths rendered anonymous to protect the bearers of this old worldview and wisdom.

However, this wide-ranging historical spectrum contains such a wealth of material that it can prove fruitful only if it is supported by a solid methodology. I would like to discuss that methodology just briefly here. For my present purposes, I use a schematic outline of matriarchal mythology which has also proven sound for the analysis of fairy tales. Since my intent is not to present the history of religious ideas nor to research all the variants of just one individual motif, I am working with structures that include all the necessary characteristics that make a certain mythology a matriarchal one. This structure of matriarchal mythology has been developed inductively from a vast amount

1 Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchal Societies. Studies on Indigenous Cultures across the Globe,* New York 2013, Peter Lang Publishing.

of material and provides common denominators. In this sense, it is a structural definition of 'matriarchal mythology.'

Furthermore, I will not confine myself to the mythological motifs and images alone, but I will also include the economic and social background of matriarchal societies as it has been given by archaeological and anthropological research.[2] Even if this background is not provided in a systematic manner here, a general consideration of economic and social patterns supports my interpretation of mythology and fairy tales. This means that I understand them from a *socio-historical point of view* which rejects romanticized, esoteric, aesthetic, formalistic, psychoanalytic interpretations, and the (unsubstantiated) theory of Jungian archetypes.

Additionally, I take mythology and mythological fairy tales seriously as an expression of a complex worldview and ritual practices, as well as a substantial source of information concerning the religious mentality of early matriarchal societies. In this context, mythology is not ideology in the Marxian sense, which functions as a guise for dominance of the ruling classes (patriarchies), because there are no ruling classes in matriarchies. The mythological motifs and images function here as a reflection of what is believed and ritually practiced in those societies.

The structure of matriarchal mythology provides the cornerstone to understand its patterns in cohesion and the reflection of matriarchal patterns in international fairy tales. This structure encompasses a great deal of information: first, it includes a rich world view that prevailed in matriarchies; second, because of my socio-historical point of view, we can see there an enormous potential in terms of cultural and social history.

Matriarchal mythology adheres to a triangular structure in which all details are embedded. This triangular structure is twofold: on the one hand it applies to the personages, functions, and attributes of the goddess in matriarchies, who is imagined as a triple goddess. On the other hand, it applies to the personages, functions, and attributes of her consort and partner, the holy king, or *heros*.[3] The Greek word *heros*, used throughout my work on matriarchal mythology, is not synonymous with the English word 'hero,' its derivative. *Heros* refers specifically to the consort of the matriarchal goddess. Male gods as eternal beings did not exist in these cultures.

The names of the personages widely vary in the concrete myths. The functions ascribed to any given personage, however, remain constant. While the attributes

2 Systematic research on social and economic patterns of matriarchal societies has been given in: Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchal Societies*; Marija Gimbutas: *The Civilization of the Goddess. The World of Old Europe*, San Francisco 1991, HarperSanFrancisco.

3 This double triangular structure refers to late matriarchal societies of Bronze Age, when men became associated with goddesses in the role of holy kings. This constellation was first researched by Robert Graves: *The Greek Myths*, New York 1955, Penguin Books. In the Neolithic Age the constellation was different, see for this: Marija Gimbutas: *The Language of the Goddess. Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization*, San Francisco 1989, Harper and Row.

encompass a given stereotypical range, they are variable within that range. To provide a better overview, I have brought these defining characteristics of matriarchal mythology into the following schematic outline.

Goddess Structure (Triad)

Personage:	Maiden	Woman and Mother	Crone
Region of Residence:	Heaven	Earth and Sea	Underworld
Season:	Spring	Summer	Fall and Winter
Function:	Bringer of Light, Huntress, Amazon	Giver of Love and Life	Giver of Death and Rebirth, Magic, Wisdom
Cosmic Incarnation:	Stars and Universe	Incarnation of the Land	Incarnation of the Depths as Cave or Bottom of the Sea
Lunar Symbol:	Crescent Moon	Full Moon	Black Moon
Symbolic Lunar Colour:	White	Red	Black
Symbolic Animals:	White Birds, Falcon, White Deer, Lions, Leopards	Doves, Bees, Cow, Goat, Sheep, Pig	Snake, Dragon, Owl, Raven, Crow, black and white Hounds
Symbolic Objects:	Bow and Arrow, Chariot drawn by Lions, Cats, or White Deer	Chalice, Apple of Love, Orchard Paradise, Magical Belts and Rings	Thread or Spindle of Fate, Scales of Fate, Apple of Death, Paradise in the Depths

Heros *Structure (related to the goddess triad)*

Personage:		(just one)	
Function:	Initiation by the Goddess in spring	Sacred Marriage with the Goddess in summer	Death and Rebirth through the Goddess in fall and winter
Fulfillment of Function:	Fulfillment of magical Tasks of Wooing the Maiden Goddess	Sacred Marriage in the Presence of Symbols of Fertility	Sacrificial Death, followed by a Journey through the Underworld until the Happy Rebirth or Return

Symbols of the *Heros*: Great variety, relative to the character of the goddess. For example:
1. She is the universe; his symbol is the sun (colours: gold and red)
2. She is the land; his symbol is the water or vegetation
3. She is the underworld; he is one of her underworld-animals.

Some comments:

The Goddess Structure shows the everchanging power of eternal renewal. The goddess reigns over the astronomical cycles (the rise and fall of sun, moon, and stars), and thus over the cycles of vegetation and the cycles of human life. She is, therefore, the Mistress of Cosmic Order, of the Earth and the Underworld. All her three personages combined form one single deity, and can never be completely severed from one another. This single deity is the matriarchal Great Goddess of the three spheres of the world – as the world order was understood at that times. Her most widespread symbol is the moon, one entity with three phases: crescent, full moon, and black moon. The white crescent moon is symbolic of the Maiden Goddess and her ceremonial hunting bow. The red full moon on the horizon is symbolic of the crimson world egg, which is an attribute of the Woman Goddess who created everything living. The black moon, invisible but nonetheless present, is symbolic of the paradoxical Crone, the Goddess of the Transition from light to dark, or from life to death, and from dark to light, or from death to life.

The *Heros* Structure is less differentiated because he represents the power of the human in contrast to the cosmic goddess. His dimensions are more limited; he has only one personage and each of his functions is relative to the goddess. It is through her that he is first granted access to knowledge and status (Initiation); then, he is integrated as a contributor to her all-encompassing fertility (Sacred Marriage); at last, it is through her that he is able to experience for himself the passages of Death and Rebirth inherent in the cycle of life. In this way, he is – like every human being – embedded in the eternal cycles of the feminine divine as cosmos and earth. The life journey through Initiation, Sacred Marriage, Death and Return is not reserved to the

man as *Heros*, but, in a more ancient pattern of matriarchal mythology, is also undergone by women as priestesses of the Goddess.

Matriarchal Mythology in Fairy Tales

Fairy tales, like myths, are neither expressions of a generalized 'soul of the people' (interpretation of the Romantic period) nor simple explanations of not-understood natural phenomena (naturalistic interpretation). Nor do they symbolize 'primordial human ideas' such as 'love' and 'death' (interpretation of history of ideas), nor does their interpretation necessitate incomprehensible psycho-spiritual 'archetypes' or 'neurotic complexes' in the form of images and dreams (psychological interpretation). They are, as myths, reflections of the world view and ritual practices of early societies which are primarily matriarchal. In my view, a cultural-historical interpretation of fairy tales is the only interpretation with a scientific foundation. It puts back this valuable tradition into the cultural framework from which it originates and is, therefore, capable of providing us with enduring insights.

During the first period of research on fairy tales, they were considered to be degenerated myths.[4] This interpretation was later rejected when the differences between the genres of 'myth' and 'fairy tale' were subjected to hairsplitting, formalistic analysis.[5] Today, the trend is again toward the first stance, which I support wholeheartedly, because the differences between 'myth' and 'fairy tale' are easily explained by the process of social decline. These differences emerged not because the common people were incapable of remembering the complex framework of the myths, or the names of mythical personages, and so simplified them and typified the figures (opinion of the formalists).

Rather, these differences developed because matriarchal myths, when repeated explicitly and by name, were antagonistic to patriarchal societies, and regarded as 'hostile' and 'heathen' to the patriarchal Christian religion. In spite of this pressure, the matriarchal world view thrived uninterrupted in the lower social classes, sub-cultures and marginalized people. But they were forced to conceal themselves, so they no longer referred explicitly to the Mother Goddess, but spoke of the 'mother,' they no longer called the daughter Goddess, high priestess, or hereditary daughter by name, but spoke simply of the 'daughter' or 'princess.' Similarly, they did not call the *Heros* by name, but referred to him only as the 'hero.' In that way, in order to keep their forbidden goddess veneration clandestine, people transformed individual divine figures

4 The Brothers Grimm propounded the notion of fairy tales being 'sunken' myths in the following works: Jacob Grimm: *Vorrede zu den Volksmärchen der Serben,* Karadschitsch 1854; Wilhelm Grimm: *Vorrede zum zweiten Band der KHM (Kinder und Hausmärchen)* 1856.

5 The difference between these genres has been discussed by Jolies, De Boor, Lüthi, De Vries; see: André Jolies: *Einfache Formen,* 1972 (5.); Helmut de Boor: "Märchenforschung," in: Zeitschrift für deutschen Unterricht 42 (1928); Max Lüthi: *Das europäische Volksmärchen,* 1974 (4.); Jan de Vries: *Forschungsgeschichte der Mythologie,* Freiburg-Mümnchen 1961. Later, researchers returned to the opinion that fairy tales emerged from myths, as the Brothers Grimm had suggested.

into nameless prototypes. Nevertheless, the old mythical structure within which these figures act remained unaltered. Thus, the fairy tale, being a veiled myth, conveys the same religious message as the myth, and is equally complex.

The discovery of this underlying structure is credited to the abstract intuition of Wladimir Propp, who researched Russian fairy tales and discovered an astonishing regularity in two sequences commonly found in fairy tales.[6] Propp, though, did not understand the meaning of them and, consequently, his discovery ossified into abstract formulas. The unwavering precision of the fairy tales' two sequences demonstrates nothing other than the matriarchal Goddess-*Heros* Structure, with its cardinal ritual acts of Initiation and Sacred Marriage (first sequence), Death and Rebirth (second sequence). This puts us, in turn, in a position to understand the content behind the fairy tale formulas.

Here, I would like to limit myself to the interpretation of only a few examples. I refer to the *Children's and Household Tales* which are most familiar to us from the collection of the famous Brothers Grimm.[7] This does not mean that I concern myself exclusively with German fairy tales, for 'German' fairy tales as such do not exist. These are simply fairy tales collected in Germany, each of which belongs to an international treasury of stories - as their many variants demonstrate. I employ all of the variants to show, on the one hand, the whole spectrum of symbols, and on the other, to reconstruct the full order of the sequences, which frequently has been cut in half. Typically, these variants encompass a territory that expands beyond Europe into the Mediterranean region, from there to the Near East, and further on as far as India – precisely the same regions in which highly advanced matriarchal religions flourished.[8]

I have organized these samples from the Brothers Grimm into three exemplary groups according to the part of the structure of matriarchal mythology to which it belongs. Of these groups, the first two: the 'Abundance-Giving Woman in the Other World' and the 'Gift-Giving Woman in a Deathlike State,' show the symbolism of the Goddess Structure. The third group, 'Fairy Tales of the Redeemer,' demonstrates the *Heros* Structure.[9] Because of the limited space which I have here for the analyses, I will

6 Wladimir Propp: *Morphologie des Märchens,* 1972.

7 Grimm, Jacob/Grimm, Wilhelm: *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, Göttingen 1856. Johannes Bolte and Georg Polivka (eds.) *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm (KHM),* Reprint, 1963, 5 volumes. – The first three volumes of this five-volume work include the collected fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm as well as a lot of explanations and an extensive index of variations on the fairy tales.

8 See the international motif-index developed by Aarne/Thompson: Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson: *The Types of the Folktale,* Helsinki, 1961 (3.), FFC 184; Stith Thompson: *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A*
Classification of Narrative Elements, Copenhagen 1955-1958 (2.) More than 40,000 individual motifs are catalogued here in six volumes.

9 These concepts have been formulated by August Nitschke: *Soziale Ordnungen im Spiegel der Märchen, Bd. 1: Das Frühe Europa,* Frommann-Holzboog, Stuttgart, 1976. – The book is a stimulating reading. Nitschke's knowledge of anthropology and cultural history, though, is utterly superficial, so his treatment of matriarchy, which he acknowledges as a period of prehistory in which women dominated, is mistaken.

present just samples from the first and second group and omit the third one.

Woman as Daughter of the Goddess: the Abundance-Giving Woman in the Other World

In the first group, I analyze *Mother Holle, or Mother Hulda* (KHM 24) and *Cinderella* (KHM 21).[10]

Mother Holle, or Mother Hulda
In this fairy tale, the central figure has not yet lost her mythical name. Mother Holle is the pre-Germanic underworld goddess 'Hel,' or 'Hella,' who, in the Christianized word 'hell' (German: 'Hölle') came to epitomize the sinister and the negative. In that way, Mother Holle was extremely demonized. In the old belief, though, she was the Earth and Underworld Goddess, Hel-Hella-Holle, who manifested the ultimate good, fertility, justice, and maternity, much as in the fairy tale Mother Holle still does.

It is not exactly clear where Mother Holle dwells: in Heaven in a house of clouds, from which she lets snow or rain fall. Here, we see her creating the weather. Yet she also lives in the Underworld. The name Holle, being akin to 'Höhle' (Gr. *cave)*, is in itself an allusion to the depths. Golden Mary, the young woman who is tormented by her stepmother, finds her beneath the well into which she sprang out of despair. The well is an entry shaft into the Underworld of Mother Holle, so she is both: Goddess of Heaven and of the Underworld. Moreover, her Underworld is a paradise called the 'Garden Evergreen.'

Golden Mary falls into a beautiful meadow full of flowers, where an apple tree in the field is so overburdened with apples that it cries out for help. Apples, we can recall, are fruits of love and death. Furthermore, Golden Mary meets a cow on the verdant landscape whose udders are bursting with milk. The cow is the sacred animal of the Mother Goddess. An oven filled with bread, the product of an agricultural society, is not absent, either. In it, the bread seems to reproduce itself so quickly that Golden Mary has to pull it from the oven with haste.

A heavenly house, maternal fertility, and a paradisiacal underworld are the characteristics of the Great Goddess in her three personifications of Maiden, Woman, and Crone. Through her triple manifestations she steers the seasons and the world, just as the Goddess Structure demonstrates.

Thus, Mother Holle is truly an Abundance-Giving Woman in the Other World. At the end of the tale, she literally showers wealth upon Golden Mary: gold rains down on the young woman from the arched gateway covering her hair and body like a beautiful dress. In mythology, the value of gold has nothing to do with economics. It refers instead symbolically to the wealth deep in the womb of the Earth: seeds, germs, and

10 My numbering of the fairy tales corresponds to Bolte/Polivka.

little animals, that is, fertility, the richness of life. Golden Mary is allowed to bring this abundance from the Underworld to the world of the living.

Now, let us have a look at the developmental arc of Golden Mary. By jumping into the well, she sets out for her journey to the Underworld, which is a journey of initiation. She patiently suffers Death and therefore experiences her own Return as 'Golden Mary.' She is initiated by the Goddess during her stay in the Underworld, for it is there where she learns the all the matriarchal crafts, arts, and magic. These encompass much more than the completion of routine household chores, as the bourgeois version of the 'diligent' Golden Mary would have us believe. They include the arts of agriculture, symbolized by the bread; the cultivation of plants, symbolized by the apple tree; the domestication of animals, symbolized by the cow; and the art of magic weather-making to keep the seasons in balance. It is no wonder, then, after she has learned all this from Mother Holle, she is herself blessed with an abundance of fertility, symbolized by gold, because she knows how to make everything bear fruit.

Golden Mary thus becomes the earthly representative of the Goddess: her priestess. From the mythological perspective, the Goddess is a mother and Golden Mary is her human, but elevated, daughter. Here the basic matriarchal relationship, the mother-daughter relationship, becomes apparent in its economic, social, and mythic dimensions, for by her initiation, the daughter inherits all from her mother.[11]

Cinderella
In this fairy tale, the Underworld journey that initiates a young woman into her matriarchal culture is minimized; still, other characteristics of the Goddess structure are better preserved. The constellation of three sisters, with the youngest and prettiest being the hereditary daughter, is typically matriarchal (principle of ultimogeniture). However, the principle of ultimogeniture is overshadowed by the patriarchal legal situation, which we can see here already instituted. Cinderella's right of inheritance is called into question because the father has a second wife with older daughters. He is therefore the one who bequeaths, which is a patriarchal principle. By the principle of ultimogeniture, however, it is the mother alone who bequeaths and, in this fairy tale, it is she who acts from the Underworld to assist Cinderella in asserting her right to the estate and crown. Cinderella, however, is no longer a sovereign woman; she becomes a princess only by marrying a prince. Thus she is defined, both as a daughter and as a wife, by her relationship to the male. In matriarchy, a prince with a crown and an estate was an impossibility.

The episodes that reflect Cinderella's relationship to her natural mother run contrary to the patriarchalization of this fairy tale; they are filled with beauty and magic and make the entire story possible. Cinderella's mother is 'dead,' which means that she lives in a grave, a house of the Underworld. From there she actively supports her daughter,

11 A similar journey of initiation can be seen in the Russian fairy tale *Wassilissa the Beautiful.* Wassilissa sets out for her journey to the Underworld and, there, she meets the goddess Baba Yaga; from her she learns all the arts and magic of her matriarchal culture. See Elisabeth Borchers (ed.): *Wassilissa die Wunderschöne*. Frankfurt, 1974.

which makes her appear to be more the Abundance-Giving Woman in the Other World than a dead mortal mother. First, she lets the magical tree that Cinderella planted as a twig grow out of her grave. Magical birds (talking doves) are perched in its boughs. Then, gold and silver rain down on Cinderella from the twigs of the tree in the same way that they came from the arched gateway for Golden Mary in the Mother Holle story. Here, too, the silver and gold cling to the young woman like magic dresses. Cinderella now goes to the ball radiating the symbolic value of life's abundance and is therefore magically irresistible to the prince. The silver or golden dress is not only a graceful symbolism of abundance, but also of the art of weaving, an authentic matriarchal art which was invented by women. (Even Golden Mary sprang into the well for a lost spindle and received it back from the hand of the spinning Mother Holle). At the close of the fairy tale, the talking birds ensure justice for Cinderella, a motif that figures prominently in the Mother Holle story, too, who protects Golden Mary from her stepmother and jealous stepsister.

The fact that Cinderella's mother dwells in the Underworld, sending the doves as symbols of Heaven and making the tree grow as a symbol of the Earth, gives evidence that she is the triple Great Goddess herself, even though she is hidden and does no longer appear in person. In one variant, she at least reaches out from the grave to personally give the magical dresses to her daughter. This is a relic of her personal, active involvement, just as Cinderella's daily tarrying and mourning at her mother's grave is a relic of what had once been the Underworld journey. Planting the magic sapling, too, is a relic of matriarchal arts which the hereditary daughter had to learn, because Cinderella's real task is not to clean house and to dig peas from the ash, but to be initiated into matriarchal knowledge.

In the end Cinderella is the triumphant, rejuvenated image of the Goddess herself: she is red and white as a 'rose and snowball,' because this was how her mother had wished she would be born (in one variation[12]). She has golden hair and is posed in golden garment; she is encircled by fluttering doves, like a daughter of the Goddess of Love.[13] It is she who chooses her partner, the prince, as partner for the Sacred Marriage, not vice versa.

Woman as Sister of Man: the Gift-Giving Woman in a Deathlike State

In this second group, I analyze *Snow White* (KHM 53) along with *The Twelve Brothers*, *The Seven Ravens*, and *The Six Swans* (KHM 9/25/49); the latter three tales form a special sub-group because they are perfectly parallel to each other, and to some more of this kind.

In these fairy tales the Abundance-Giving Woman is no longer a divine personage from the Underworld, but rather the Daughter herself, who is temporarily put into an

12 See notes 7 and 8 for variations.

13 Golden hair and sacred doves are characteristics of the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite.

otherworldly state. The mother-daughter relationship recedes into the background in order to demonstrate the complete development of the daughter, for she is now both daughter and mother. Only in this combined role does the full breadth of riches acquired in the initiation become apparent.

The fairy tales of this second group demonstrate exactly this narrative pattern if we also include their second sequences. The second sequences are often cut off in the Grimms' *Children's and Household Tales*, but they are contained in the variants.

Snow White
In this fairy tale, the matriarchal symbolism is even more pronounced in this fairy tale. According to the wishes of her mother, who passes away into the Underworld as soon as Snow White is born, the daughter appears in the three sacred colors; they are her mother's gift to her. She is white like snow, red like blood, and her hair is black like ebony. She is the matriarchal ideal of beauty, like the triple Goddess herself. No wonder, then, that she surpasses all beauty. Furthermore, she is closely entwined with the magic apple of life and death. In the variant from India, she is even born from the apple and is called 'Little Pomegranate.' The pomegranate is the classical symbol of the apple of death. As a consequence, Snow White is put into a deathlike state by an apple at the hands of her stepmother.

Snow White sleeps in a place no less mysterious than the Underworld. It was not at all a glass coffin, which is merely a miniaturized version of the true location: she sleeps in the Glass Mountain or the Glass Castle (variant from Austria). The Glass Mountain, guarded by elf-like beings, is a place of the Underworld in pre-Celtic mythology. The Fairy Morrigain/Morgane had the habit of surrounding her resting places with an impenetrable wall of air, supplying the illusion that she was resting in a castle of glass. A passer-by could observe her, but in no way reach her. This was usually fatal because he would fall in love with her and lose himself in a trance, or in a lover's frenzy. This passion was evoked by her beauty, which lay in the fact that Morgane appears in three sacred colors - white, red, and black - which are, again, a magical symbol of the triple Goddess herself. In the fairy tale, the same thing happens to the prince at the sight of Snow White.

But Snow White is guarded by so so-called 'dwarves,' elf-like beings who themselves reside in the subterranean region and retrieve 'treasures' which symbolically represent fertility from the womb of the Earth. Dwarves are called *Alben* in pre-Germanic mythology, and they are powerful and mighty; in pre-Celtic mythology they are fairy kings, graced with charm and magical skills, who are the constant companions, guardians, and defenders of the divine fairies. In these mythological systems, they never are cute or silly figures, but rather are formidable opponents to the intruding males. It might thus not have been so easy for the passing-by prince to win Snow White as his beloved queen.

In order to recognize the full matriarchal pattern in the plot, we need to add the

second sequence of this fairy tale. In this second part, Snow White receives, still while sleeping, the prince's love and gives birth to two children, as a true Gift-Giving Woman in a Deathlike State. The children awaken her by sucking the ring of sleep from her finger. When she awakens, she calls her little daughter 'Moon' and her little son 'Sun' (Oriental version of this fairy tale). Here, though, these names do not represent just the children, but rather indicate that the radiating children of Snow White are the real heavenly bodies: the sun and the moon.

While awakening from the Underworld, Snow White proceeds through a chain of transformations which encompass the most splendid forms of vegetation: a sunflower, a mango tree, and several fruits (variant from India). These demonstrate the gifts of fertility she is bringing with her from the Underworld. Thus, she must be understood as the Earth goddess herself, awakening from her deathlike sleep during winter in the Glass Castle of ice. The moon and sun are awakening her in spring, reviving her and all of nature.

It must be added that, because Snow White gave birth to the lights of Heaven, moon and sun, she is also connected to the sphere of Heaven. And she knows the Underworld through her magic sleep in its depth. This might indicate that she has been seen as an image of the triple Goddess herself, whose three sacred colors are characteristic for the appearance of Snow White.

Here we see the transformation of the imperilled daughter to her full maternal powers. The Gift-Giving Woman in a Deathlike State finds herself in dangerous states of absence, such as sleep, muteness, or 'death,' which represent her journey through the Underworld. Finally, by becoming a mother herself, she participates in the powers of the Mother Goddess and is transformed into Her image.[14]

The Twelve Brothers, *The Seven Ravens*, *The Six Swans*
In this special group of fairy tales, the second sequence which leads from Marriage to the Underworld and to the Return of the woman has been perfectly preserved. Including both sequences, these fairy tales show the same precise patterns of action we see in *Snow White*, and similar ones: the imperilled daughter becomes queen (first sequence), then she suffers a dangerous, otherworldly journey in a deathlike state in order to return as the saviour and giver of life (second sequence).

However, the wealth of relationships enjoyed by the women of this group of fairy tales encompasses not only that of daughter and mother, but also that of sister and brother. In fact, being sisters is their primary role, as is evidenced by their deep commitment to their brothers throughout their hard work dedicated to them. They are prepared to sacrifice wealth, crown, reputation, the love of their husbands, even their children and their own lives, in the effort to rescue their brothers. The sister-brother relationship is so profound here as to far outweigh conjugal bonds. The reason for this lies in the fact

14 The fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* shows the same pattern and spiritual content as *Snow White*, if the second sequence, preserved in variants, is included.

that the relationship between sisters and brothers in these fairy tales is matriarchal, while the relationship between wife and husband, the king, is patriarchal. In matriarchal societies, the relationship between sisters and brothers is the closest after the relationship between mothers and daughters; their emotional bond is intense, for they are the children of the same mother.

The woman as priestess or queen plays a central and active role in matriarchies, for she has everything in her hands: the land, the crown, the matriarchal arts, the sacred knowledge, and her lifegiving powers. She has won all during her initiation from her mother, but she is supported by her brothers in every phase of her life. Sisters and brothers live together in their mother's clan house throughout their lives, and they share the social, economic, and spiritual responsibilities of the clan. Therefore, in matriarchal societies, the true female-male pair is sister and brother, not wife and husband.

In this group of fairy tales, the brothers, on the contrary, own nothing; they stray through the forests hunting prey and are not even truly human, for they appear in skins or feathers, while the sister wears beautiful self-made clothing. These men lack even a shirt on their backs! They have been cursed and banished to the wilderness by an old 'witch' – she usually is the demonized goddess of the Underworld, the Goddess of Fate, who was initiating the brothers' journey through the Underworld. Being enchanted into animal form is a symbolic representation of social death as a human. The enchanted brothers have not a clue as to how to escape their animal figure of horses, bears, ravens, swans, snakes, frogs etc. and to again become human.

Being children of the same mother and belonging together, the sister in each of these fairy tales apparently takes pity on her brothers in their wretched state. Therefore, she starts caring for them, because the brothers are totally dependent on her. The sister wants to transform them from the wild state to a human one again by giving them clothes and making them cultivated residents of her home. This act from her symbolizes redeeming her brothers. She employs a counter-magic that she has learned from her mother. If the Goddess of Fate has woven for them animal caps that enchanted them into animals, the sister now weaves human shirts for her brothers. If the Goddess of Fate plunged them to their death as human beings, the sister voluntarily participates in her brothers' departure from the human realm by entering the deathlike state herself. She remains silent and void of any expression of human emotion, as do her animal brothers. Thus, she appears to be mentally and emotionally dead and symbolically takes part in her brothers' journey through the Underworld. However, through this process she wins the power of redemption in order to reawaken their human life. This demonstrates that, by her own otherworldly journey, the sister comes to possess some traits of the Goddess of Fate, who had woven the animal caps for the men. Like the Goddess of Fate, the sister can, also through the art of weaving, cast spells and deliver her brothers from 'death.'

This behaviour and indeed this entire constellation is held suspect by the patriarchal

king who, in these fairy tales, has made the sister his wife because of her beauty. He did not ask for her consent, because, while weaving, the sister remained totally mute. Now it is the patriarchal king who makes himself important as husband, a position that a lover or mate never had in matriarchal societies. Now he – not she – owns the land, the castle, the crown, and now he generously places a crown on the sister's head by making her his queen, again not having asked her before (first sequence). In spite of these 'honors' by the patriarchal king, the sister does not abandon her matriarchal values and behaviour. She endures all suspicions and accusations, until she is found guilty of the most mortal sin: she is blamed to have killed her newborn child and is vilified to be a 'witch.' In fact, it is her wicked mother-in-law who has stolen the child. Then the sister is condemned by the king to be burned to death at the stake. This brutal fact concerns nothing more than mere physical death or pure destruction, whereas all the forms of death we have until now encountered in matriarchal thinking were always transformations into a higher life. The orchestration of these processes in matriarchies rested in the magic of the goddesses and in the hands of women, and they never meant destruction.

However, it does not come to the worst: the fairy tales of this group always come to the good end that, just in the moment when the flames start to blaze, the period of the magic year of weaving and silence draws to a close, and the animal-brothers happen by. The sister throws the human shirts over them, they are freed from the charm, and extinguish the flames. That is to say, it is the woman who saves the man from 'death' by transforming him into a human, civilized, and socially responsible partner. She delivers him first of all in the form of her brother.

Transformations of Fairy Tales

Now that this comparative study has revealed the structure of international fairy tales to be based on matriarchal mythology and ritual practice, I would like to consider and compare the various transformations of that structure. These transformations are not arbitrary, but follow certain rules which become recognizable as systematic distortions of the original stories and their content. The distortions, in turn, inform us of the social motivations and political functions behind the deformations; they are due to patriarchal ideology and social patterns, which are mirrored in these distortions. I have already made references to this process by which matriarchal mythology was patriarchalized; now I would like to explain it in regard to the fairy tales.

The structure of the first fairy tale *Mother Holle* is very ancient, because the mother-daughter relationship predominates. It corresponds, in the field of mythology and ritual practice, to early matriarchal patterns. The mother-daughter relationship is the spiritual goddess-priestess relationship here. In terms of inheritance, it meant the bequeathing of cultic knowledge and magical powers. The characteristics of the all-encompassing goddess are that she is the Mistress of the Underworld, and of Heaven and Earth as the Triple Goddess of all three regions. The daughter goes through phases

of initiation in which she is withdrawn from the world. This enables her not only to become like the Goddess, but to be identified with her, for she wins the abilities of the Goddess.

At this stage, male partners play no role whatever; they are not even considered to be 'impregnators' because pregnancy is seen to be the result of eating a fruit or viewing a magical sign. This can be seen with *Snow White*, whose mother sees three magical drops of blood in the snow, and by regarding the three sacred colours white-red-black she becomes pregnant. The central action revolves only around mother and daughter. Problems arise through surrogate stepmothers and stepsisters who seek to deprive the daughter of the goddess of her spiritual inheritance. These figures are later interpolations, because they are connected to a 'father' who plays no role at all besides having married a second wife. This shows the first patriarchal deformations.

The structure of *Cinderella* has been much more altered. Even if the spiritual relationship between mother and daughter is at the core of the story, a patriarchal family pattern is, again, introduced and Cinderella's mother is diminished to a dead and nearly forgotten relative. In spite of her magical gift-giving powers, her name as a goddess is concealed – a typical patriarchal deformation. Now, the man is playing a role as 'prince,' but he is depicted as mate only, as the consort of the Goddess of Love to whom Cinderella is transformed in the end.

The most drastic alteration, however, is evident in the deformation of the original structure of fairy tales, which consists of two sequences. The first sequence is the dangerous way of the daughter through the process of Initiation, leading in many cases to Sacred Marriage; the second shows her journey through the Underworld and her Return into a higher life, in most cases as an image of the Goddess Herself. The far-reaching consequences of the loss of the second sequence can be seen in *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and, also, in *Sleeping Beauty*. These fairy tales close at a point that now the only goal worth pursuing seems to be marriage, to have a husband, especially a prince, a man of higher rank – the best patriarchal 'happy ending' for a woman. In that way, the mythical figures of Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and Snow White are robbed of their cosmic dimension. Once these women have lost their cosmic dimensions, the major portion of their activity becomes obliterated. Thus, even though the princes have done nothing to earn the privilege, they find themselves in the position of being the final rescuers and redeemers. But it is precisely this second sequence that often includes the loss of the consort and the woman's subsequent mythical-magical search through the Underworld to find him; therefore, she is acting as *his* redeemer *(Cinderella*, *Frog King)*. It is, then, no coincidence that the elimination of the second sequence is auspicious for the male, but results in a drastic reduction of the woman's powers.

When the second sequence is included in *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*, the cosmic dimension of the woman becomes obvious: she brings forth the astral bodies sun and moon and the fertility of the earth. In this constellation, the prince as consort has little

importance, he is nothing else than a short-term lover, not even being able to wake the sleeping woman up. When she arises from her otherworldly state in the end, she has become a goddess herself, although without name. But this 'happy ending' as the final divine appearance of the woman is not at all wanted in patriarchy and has led to the intentional suppression of the second sequence.

The silencing of the women's mythological names and, through that, their simplification into stereotypical characters was just the beginning of patriarchalization. This is immediately followed by a demonization of the Goddess that is taken, in some cases, to absurdity. The Abundance-Giving Mother recedes more and more into the background, or is made into a 'witch' who curses her own children (*The Twelve Brothers)*, or even wants to devour them *(Haensel and Gretel)*. The rule of matriarchal inheritance is completely destroyed by putting in the giving mother's place a ruling, kingly father who owns everything and has complete command. The motif of the woman's sisterly love and deep commitment to her brothers arouses suspicion to be too matriarchal, therefore the sister must be married to a patriarchal husband. But this constellation makes the loyalty of the sister's support of her brothers an inexplicable motif; she is simply said to be a 'very good' sister.

In another group of fairy tales, the man acts as redeemer and the 'brothers' are considered to be related to each other, but not to the woman they woo (*The Four Ingenious Brothers* and similar tales). This has the function of placing the woman in the background. After all, what kind of heroic deed should she perform for husbands who are strangers to her? These brothers, on the other hand, become the luminous pivotal point in the plot. Through this manipulation, the matriarchal relationship to the brothers is destroyed and is replaced in all these tales by a patriarchal relationship. Now it is the woman who is rescued, elevated, banished, humiliated, accused, or sentenced to death by her husband according to his arbitrary will, so that in the end, she is belittled into an absolutely passive role and is to be given as an inanimate object by the father to the husband (for example, *The Brave Little Tailor)*.

There is also an element of parody in the trivialization of symbols. The princesses who, in the beginning, were magical and powerful, are later portrayed as little more than curious girls *(Sleeping Beauty)*, naively and fickle *(Snow White)*, or capricious (*Frog King)*. The ordinary women are constantly doing housework (for ex. *Cinderella*, and Golden Mary in *Mother Holle)*. Erotic acts are reduced to a kiss or a gaze or "playing" in the bedroom. Accordingly, the symbols surrounding these infantilized figures are: a golden ball, and a hoppity, though somewhat slippery little frog (*Frog King)*; a sugary, sweet gingerbread house *(Haensel und Gretel)*; an enchanted child-brother as a little deer led on a golden leash *(Little Brother and Little Sister)*; clever, but helpless and sentimental garden dwarves (*Snow White)*.

Here, the Brothers Grimm have diligently lent expression to the patriarchal doll-like version of the woman of their time, while revising and editing the once mythological tales as *Children's and Household Tales*. They did the last step in patriarchalizing these mythological stories by fictionalizing them, which is to say, by presenting their figures

and content as products of mere fantasy. This stripped them of any relation to cultural history and social reality and made them, at last, into ‘fairy tales’ – a literary genre they never had been before.

About the Author

Heide Goettner-Abendroth has published on philosophy of science and extensively on matriarchal society and culture; she has become the founder of Modern Matriarchal Studies. Her main works are *Matriarchal Societies. Studies on Indigenous Cultures across the Globe* (Lang 2013, New York) and *Matriarchal Societies of the Past and the Origin of Patriarchy. West Asia and Europe*, (Lang 2022, New York). Visiting professor at the University of Montreal in Canada and the University of Innsbruck in Austria. Founder and director of the International Academy HAGIA for Matriarchal Studies (www.hagia.de). Dr. Goettner-Abendroth can found at www.goettner-abendroth.de.

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Traces of the Feminine: Matriculture in the Traditional Ho-Chunk Life World

PATRICK J. JUNG, PhD

Abstract

The Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) people of the western Great Lakes region of North America possess a culture characterized by patrilineal descent. Anthropologists have long believed patrilineality was a post-European contact phenomenon, and that the pre-contact Ho-Chunks possessed a matrilineal culture. The near destruction of this society by the Illiniwek nations (Illinois Confederacy) in the 1640s and 1650s, followed by the introduction of the fur trade, necessitated a societal reorganization that favored smaller, mobile villages characterized by patrilineal descent in the same manner as the Ho-Chunks' Central Algonquian neighbors. Nevertheless, symbols of the earlier matrilineal culture carried forward into the post-contact era, and the historic Ho-Chunk people retained important matrilineal elements. The Ho-Chunks' oral traditions reflect these elements, all of which became a powerful set of symbols that constituted what Clifford Geertz labels 'an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms.' Ethnographic and ethnohistoric sources provide evidence for the social processes that resulted from this symbolic system, including the strong avuncular relationship between a man and his sisters' children. Descent, under certain conditions, could also proceed through the female line with children receiving their clan affiliations from the mother rather than the father. Similarly, the possessor of a clan war bundle

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could bequeath the sacred object to a male child of his sister rather than one of his own sons. The Ho-Chunk also possessed powerful female deities such as the Moon and the Earth in their pantheon. The best example of the underlying matriculture of Ho-Chunk society was the elevation of a woman, Hąboguwįga (Glory of the Morning), as the leader of the Grand Village of the Ho-Chunks at the head of Lake Winnebago after the death of her father during the eighteenth century.

Keywords: Ho-Chunk, matrilineal system, Oneota, Chiwere Siouan, Hąboguwįga (Glory of the Morning)

Résumé

Le peuple Ho-Chunk (ou Winnebagos) de la région des grand Lacs occidentaux de l'Amérique du Nord possède aujourd'hui une culture caractérisée par un régime patrilinéaire. Les anthropologues pensent depuis longtemps que ce régime est un phénomène qui s'est mis en place après l'arrivée des Européens et que les Ho-Chunks possédaient avant cela un régime matrilinéaire. La quasi-destruction de la société Ho-Chunk par les tribus de la Confédération des Illinois vers 1640, suivie par l'introduction du commerce des fourrures, aurait provoqué un ré-organisation sociétale favorisant des villages mobiles et plus petits centrés sur des groupes de parenté patrilinéaires, comme ce fut le cas chez les gens de langues algonquiennes voisins des Ho-Chunks. Pourtant, d'importants éléments de l'ancienne culture matrilinéaire survécurent durant l'ère qui suivit le contact avec les Européens. Les traditions orales reflètent ces éléments qui sont devenus de puissants symboles, constituant ainsi ce que Clifford Geertz définit comme 'un schéma de sens et signification transmis historiquement et incarné dans des symboles, soit un système de conceptions exprimées sous des formes symboliques.' Les sources ethno-historiques révèlent des exemples probants des processus sociaux découlant de ce système symbolique, y compris la relation avunculaire fortement développée entre le frère de la mère (oncle maternel) et les enfants de celle-ci. Par exemple, sous certaines conditions, le lignage pouvait bifurquer vers la lignée maternelle alors que les enfants se retrouvaient affiliés au clan de leur mère. De la même façon, le propriétaire d'un paquet-médecine pouvaient léguer cet objet sacré (et donc transmettre les responsabilités rituelles associées) au fils de sa sa sœur plutôt qu'à l'un de ses propre fils. De plus, les Ho-Chunks reconnaissaient dans leurs panthéon de puissantes figures divine feminine telles la Lune et la Terre. Le meilleur exemple du système matriculturel sous-jacents dans la société Ho-Chunk est l'ascension d'une femme, Tcap'osgaga

(Gloire du Matin), au rang de chef du Grand Village des Ho-Chunk du lac Winnebago à la mort de son père au dix-huitième siècle.

Mot-clés: Ho-Chunk, système matrilinéaire, Oneota, Chiwere Siuan, Hąboguwįga (Gloire du Matin)

The Ho-Chunk nation's history in the western Great Lakes of North America extends at least one thousand years into the past. Unlike contemporaneous Native societies such as the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois League) and the Wendat (Huron Confederacy), the Ho-Chunks were sparsely documented in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the early French colonizers. Therefore, many questions remain concerning Ho-Chunk history. However, written documents are only one category of sources. The oral traditions of the Ho-Chunks provide a wealth of information that allows scholars to develop an understanding of their social structure and culture, as do the scattered documentary sources penned by French and later British and American observers. Ethnographic and ethnohistoric assessments indicate that by the eighteenth century the Ho-Chunks possessed a patrilineal, exogamous clan structure. However, this was a later phenomenon brought about by the dramatic changes the Ho-Chunks experienced after a series of catastrophic wars in the seventeenth century. Prior to these conflicts, the Ho-Chunks likely possessed a matrilineal kinship system that, along with a strong feminine cosmology, created a set of symbolic systems that resulted in lingering but unambiguous matrilineal elements even as the Ho-Chunks transitioned to a patrilineal society. These matrilineal elements provided the cultural mechanisms by which a Ho-Chunk woman, Hąboguwįga (Glory of the Morning), became a leader of her people in the eighteenth century.

The Ho-Chunks' symbolic systems provide evidence of their earlier matrilineal society and the cultural store that paved the way for Hąboguwįga's later ascension to leadership. This is particularly true of Ho-Chunk oral traditions, which provide what Clifford Geertz calls "a set of moods and motivations - an ethos…an image of cosmic order - a world view - by means of a single set of symbols."[1] Symbolic systems, according to Geertz, whether religious, political, aesthetic, etc., perform two functions. They provide a model *of* reality that allows for "the manipulation of symbol structures so as to bring them, more or less closely, into parallel with the pre-established nonsymbolic system." They also provide a model *for* reality, or "the manipulation of the nonsymbolic systems in terms of the relationships expressed in the symbolic."[2] This relationship between the symbolic and nonsymbolic - unlike earlier, more rigid conceptions of culture - is flexible and provides

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1 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 118 (qtd. 118).

2 Ibid., 93, 123-25 (qtd. 93).

cultures with “plans, recipes, rules, instructions,” “a set of control mechanisms … for the governing of behavior” according to Geertz.[3] Marie-Françoise Guédon further argues that Geertz’s definition of a cultural system allows scholars to shift from the narrow understanding of matrilineality to the broader notion of matriculture that “emphasizes the cultural context in which such traits as matrilineality can arise.”[4] In the case of the Ho-Chunks, the shift to patrilineality did not result in a rigid system but instead constituted a set of flexible practices that allowed for the continuance of important matrilineal elements and thus a discernable, if transformed, matriculture.

Archaeological and ethnohistorical sources provide tantalizing but often ambiguous information concerning the early history of the Chiwere Siouan Ho-Chunks. Midwestern archaeologists have long asserted that no direct connection can be made between the various archaeological assemblages in present-day northeastern Wisconsin (particularly the region of Green Bay and the Fox River valley, the earliest homeland of the Ho-Chunk people) and the Native societies of the post-European contact era. They have nonetheless cautiously advanced the notion that the Ho-Chunks (or, perhaps more accurately, the ancestral Ho-Chunks) produced the archaeological manifestation known as the Lake Winnebago Phase, a component of the broader Oneota archeological tradition. They also cautiously postulate that other groups or their ancestral populations such as the Chiwere Siouan Ioways and the Algonquian Menominees might have been associated with the Lake Winnebago Phase and other Oneota assemblages.[5] The earliest contact between the Native peoples of the western Great Lakes and Europeans occurred in the guise of the French diplomat Jean Nicolet, who arrived in either 1633 or 1634 to negotiate a truce between the Native nations of Lake Huron and those at Green Bay. French Jesuits preserved the details of Nicolet’s mission, but their texts present only the broad contours of his voyage and the barest scraps of information concerning the Native people he met. Later French sources, especially the writings of Nicolas Perrot (edited and published by Claude Charles Le Roy, Bacqueville de la Potherie) and Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, indicate the Ho-Chunks numbered as many as twenty thousand persons before they became engaged in a disastrous series of conflicts with the Illiniwek nations (Illinois Confederacy) and other Central Algonquians, especially the Meskwakis (Foxes), in the 1640s and 1650s. By the 1660s, when Jesuit missionaries entered the region, the Ho-Chunks’ numbered only about six hundred persons, a ninety-seven percent decrease in

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3 Ibid., 44 (qtd. 44).

4 Marie-Françoise Guédon, “Introduction,” *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 1 (May 2020): 5-6 (qtd. 6).

5 David F. Overstreet, “Oneota Prehistory and History,” *Wisconsin Archeologist* 78 (January-December 1997): 251-96; Patricia B. Richards, “I Should Have Dug Red Banks: Winnebago and Menominee Ethnicity, Identity, and Homelands,” *Wisconsin Archeologist* 84 (January-December 2003): 243, 247; Richard W. Edwards IV, *Indigenous Life Around the Great Lakes: War, Climate, and Culture* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 15, 19, 24-25.

population.[6] Thus, the society that Nicolet met in the early 1630s was dramatically larger and very different from that which later French arrivals encountered from the 1660s onward.

Ho-Chunk translates as 'People of the Big Voice,' or 'People of the Parent Speech' and denotes that other Chiwere Siouans such as the Ioways, Missourias, and Otos descended from the Ho-Chunks.[7] The ancestors of these societies likely arrived in the western Great Lakes from the south (possibly the Ohio Valley) between 700 C.E. and 1000 C.E. Later, as groups migrated westward toward the Mississippi Valley and the Great Plains beginning as early as the mid-1200s C.E., they emerged as the Ioways, Missourias, and Otos. Those communities that remained in northeastern Wisconsin coalesced as the Ho-Chunks. The westward migrations were largely complete by about 1500 C.E. Archaeological and linguistic data indicate the Ho-Chunks, Ioways, Missourias, and Otos maintained cultural and economic contacts, and the latter nations' oral traditions recognize their common ancestry and descent from the Ho-Chunks.[8] The physical separation of these far-flung societies was likely the impetus for those communities that remained in northeastern Wisconsin to adopt the name 'Ho-Chunk,' although when they did this is uncertain. The earliest recorded instance of the word is found in a 1721 letter by Charlevoix, but the Ho-Chunks assert their name had a genesis that predated the contact period.[9] Central Algonquians called them the *Ouinipigou* (anglicized as Winnebago), or 'People of the Foul-Smelling Water,' a reference to their residence along the shores of Green Bay and a name

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6 Patrick J. Jung, *The Misunderstood Mission of Jean Nicolet: Uncovering the Story of the 1634 Journey* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2018), 34-35, 109-10, 143-45, 161-62; Claude Charles Le Roy, Bacqueville de la Potherie, "History of the Savage Peoples Who Are Allies of New France," in *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes*, vol. 1, Emma H. Blair, ed. and trans. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1911), 293-300; Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, *Journal of a Voyage to North-America*, 2 vols. (London: J. Dodsley, 1761), 1:286, 2:61-64.

7 Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "Winnebago," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 15, *Northeast*, Bruce G. Trigger, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978), 706.

8 James W. Springer and Stanley R. Witkowski, "Siouan Historical Linguistics and Oneota Archaeology," in *Oneota Studies*, University of Minnesota Publications in Anthropology No. 1, Guy Gibbon, ed. (Minneapolis: Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota, 1982), 73-75, 80; Overstreet, "Oneota Prehistory and History," 274; Robert L. Hall, *An Archaeology of the Soul: North American Indian Belief and Ritual* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 152; David Lee Smith, *Folklore of the Winnebago Tribe* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 7, 26-27; Eric Buffalohead, "Dhegihan History: A Personal Journey," *Plains Anthropologist* 49 (November 2004): 334-35; Dale R. Henning and Thomas D. Thiessen, "Summary and Conclusions," *Plains Anthropologist* 49 (November 2004): 591-92; Thomas D. Thiessen, "Traditional and Historical Summary," *Plains Anthropologist* 49 (November 2004): 361-62; Dale Henning, pers. comm., 30 August 2019.

9 Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "Winnebago Protohistory," in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, Stanley Diamond, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 793; Charlevoix, *Journal of a Voyage to North-America*, 1:286, 2:61-64; Smith, *Folklore of the Winnebago Tribe*, 7.

their Central Algonquian neighbors and later white colonizers used well into the twentieth century. The French called them the *Puans* (also spelled *Puant and Puants*), a clipped version of *Les Gens de l'eau Puante*, which had the same meaning as Ouinipigou and referenced the malodorous freshwater along which they lived.[10] The word 'Puans' often has been mistranslated into English as 'Stinkards,' but the French did not use the term derogatorily to describe the Ho-Chunks' hygiene. The term may have been an instance of French word play as 'Puans' is remarkably similar to the generic word for Siouan peoples, *Bwan*, in several Algonquian languages.[11] This would not be surprising given that the French first learned of the Ho-Chunks and other Siouans with whom they initially had no contact from Algonquian nations such as the Odawas.[12]

Conflicts with their Central Algonquian neighbors in the years after Nicolet's visit resulted in significant changes to the Ho-Chunks' social structure. While these conflicts had earlier antecedents, they became more lethal in the late 1640s and continued into the 1650s. A French source written in September 1646 described the Ho-Chunks (in the present tense) as 'numerous and sedentary.'[13] Presumably, the conflicts with the Illiniwek and the Meskwakis began after this date. This was about the same time as the Haudenosaunee began their assault against the Wendats and other Native societies in the eastern Great Lakes, commencing in earnest with a major Haudenosaunee attack against the Wendat village of Teanaostaiaé in 1648. In the western Great Lakes, the Illiniwek's program of expansion was triggered in part by the disorder resulting from incursions by Haudenosaunee war parties.[14] Unlike the well-documented conflicts of the

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10 Lurie, "Winnebago," 706; Frederic Baraga, *A Dictionary of the Otchipwe Language* (Cincinnati: Jos. A. Hemann, 1853), 91; J.A. Cuoq, *Lexique de la Langue Algonquine* (Montreal: J. Chapleau & Fils, 1886), 77; Jung, *Misunderstood Mission of Jean Nicolet*, 69, 72-75, 92.

11 David Kaufman, a student of Siouan languages, and the Nehinuw (Cree) scholar Keith Goulet of the First Nations University of Canada are to be thanked for assisting in the formulation of this hypothesis concerning the meaning of the French word Puans and its relation to the Algonquian word Bwan. See David Kaufman, pers. comm., 24 September 2019; and Keith Goulet, pers. comm., 26 September 2019. One of the clearest sources for understanding the French meaning of Puans comes from Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, who wrote in 1718, "The Puans derive this name from their river…during the heat of summer, on account of either the quality of the water or the too great quantity of fish, the water…becomes foul and putrid…. It is for this reason that the nation is called that of the Puans, for both in their persons and their habits they are the cleanest among the Savages; and their women…are exceedingly careful to keep their cabins very clean and tidy." See Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, "Relation of Sieur de Lamothe Cadillac, 1718," *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, Lyman C. Draper, et al., eds., 31 vols. (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1855-1931), 16:360 (hereafter cited as *WHC*).

12 Jung, *Misunderstood Mission of Jean Nicolet*, 69, 74-75.

13 Marie de l'Incarnation, *Word from New France: The Selected Letters of Marie de l'Incarnation*, Joyce Marshall, ed. and trans. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), 159-60 (qtd. 159). Also see Jung, *Misunderstood Mission of Jean Nicolet*, 161-63, 165-66, 198n39.

14 Bruce G. Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660*, 2 vols. (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1976), 2:723-88; Robert M. Morrissey, *Empire by*

Haudenosaunee, sources that describe the war between the Ho-Chunks, Illiniwek, and Meskwakis are often vague as to dates and places. Nevertheless, all the historical sources - ethnohistoric documents, archaeological data, and Ho-Chunk oral traditions - present a story of catastrophic population losses due to these conflicts. Epidemic diseases might also have contributed to Ho-Chunk population declines even before the wars of the 1640s and 1650s.[15] Thus, it should be no surprise that the society that existed before these cataclysmic wars would be significantly different than that which emerged from remnant Ho-Chunk populations in the post-conflict era.

Paul Radin, a Euro-American anthropologist, conducted extensive ethnographic research among the Ho-Chunks, particularly those in Nebraska, during the early decades of the twentieth century. Radin was the first to posit that before these conflicts, the Ho-Chunks possessed a hierarchical society characterized by matrilineal descent. In his study of Ho-Chunk oral traditions, he argued the *Red Horn Cycle* of narratives that chronicle the adventures of the culture hero Red Horn provide strong evidence for such a society. Radin believed it to be a particularly old narrative as it contained elements found in the traditions of other Siouan peoples, including the Ioways, thus suggesting a distant lineage. In this cycle, Red Horn and his brothers compete for the hand of a chief's daughter by running a race. In the end, Red Horn's eldest brother marries the woman and is elevated to the position of chief. Radin, in his summary of the principal points of the *Red Horn Cycle*, noted:

> [W]e are at once struck with the fact that this setting possesses traits different from those we are accustomed to associate with Winnebago [Ho-Chunk] civilization. There is…evidence of the existence of real rank. The chief and his family occupy a very special position. His daughter…sits on a special platform to view the foot race. Captured women are given away as presents. Women, in fact, are everywhere in evidence.[16]

Collaboration: Indians, Colonists, and Governments in Colonial Illinois Country (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 32, 34.

15 Potherie, "History of the Savage Peoples," 294-300; Overstreet, "Oneota Prehistory and History," 283-87; David F. Overstreet, pers. comm., 19 April 2017, 21 July 2021; Lurie, "Winnebago Protohistory," 803-4; William Green, "Examining Protohistoric Depopulation in the Upper Midwest," *Wisconsin Archeologist* 74 (March-December 1993): 290-323. Carolyn Fiscus, a Ho-Chunk elder in Nebraska, is to be thanked for providing a contemporary Ho-Chunk understanding of these conflicts. See Carolyn Fiscus, pers. comm., 18-19 December 2020.

16 Paul Radin, *Winnebago Hero Cycles: A Study in Aboriginal Literature* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1948), 40, 43-45, 116, 123 (qtd. 45).

Radin went on to write, "Internal evidence, myth, tradition, custom, all point to a period in Winnebago [Ho-Chunk] history where descent was reckoned in the female line, not, as now, in the male line."[17]

Radin wrote little more on the earlier culture of the Ho-Chunk people before the conflicts of the 1640s and 1650s, although his work provided a foundation for later anthropologists. John Staeck has done the most in-depth analysis of Ho-Chunk oral traditions, and his work lends support to Radin's earlier assertions. Like Radin, Staeck argues that Ho-Chunk oral traditions reflect elements that were added over the course of many centuries.[18] Archaeologists have identified three discernable periods in northeastern Wisconsin. The Emergent Horizon existed by about 900 C.E. and, according to later Ho-Chunk oral traditions, was primarily a Chiwere Siouan society composed of dispersed homesteads. During the Developmental Horizon beginning sometime between 1000 and 1150 C.E., the oral traditions suggest larger, clustered villages that had increasing contacts with each other. Finally, the Classic Horizon began about 1300 C.E. and continued until the Ho-Chunks experienced their cataclysmic wars of the mid-seventeenth century. Both the extant archaeological evidence and the later Ho-Chunk oral traditions indicate the society of this period consisted of closely allied networks or possibly alliances of populous villages that possessed multiple family lineages.[19]

The Classic Horizon was a period of efflorescence of Ho-Chunk society in present-day northeastern Wisconsin. The middle Fox River in particular became densely populated with more than fifty discrete village sites in evidence. Corn agriculture became a significant subsistence strategy, and multiple lineages inhabited these villages. This society likely did not constitute a single polity but instead consisted of an alliance or alliances of closely related Ho-Chunk communities that stretched through the middle and upper Fox River valley northward along the eastern shore of the Door Peninsula of Green Bay. According to French sources, these communities had ties to other Chiwere Siouan communities such as the Ioways of the upper Mississippi Valley and beyond, stretching westward to the Great Plains.[20]

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17 Radin, *Winnebago Hero Cycles*, 45 (qtd. 45).

18 John P. Staeck, "Archaeology, Identity, and Oral Tradition: A Reconsideration of Late Prehistoric and Early Historic Winnebago Social Structure and Identity as Seen Through Oral Traditions" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1994), 18, 302-15, 496, 513.

19 Staeck, "Archaeology, Identity, and Oral Tradition," 513-20; John P. Staeck, "Echoing the Past: Reconciling Ethnohistorical and Archaeological Views of Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) Ethnogenesis," in *Interpretations of Native North American Life: Material Contributions to Ethnohistory*, Michael S. Nassaney and Eric S. Johnson, eds. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 100-4; Overstreet, "Oneota Prehistory and History," 255-87.

20 Overstreet, "Oneota Prehistory and History," 274-87; Staeck, "Echoing the Past," 102-5; Seth A. Schneider, "Oneota Ceramic Production and Exchange: Social, Economic, and Political Interactions in Eastern Wisconsin between A.D. 1050-1400" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015), 358-66; Robert A. Birmingham and Amy L. Rosebrough, *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin*, 2nd

Oral traditions, as mentioned, indicate the matrilineal character of early Ho-Chunk society, although matrilineality likely did not characterize the societies of the earlier Emergent and Developmental Horizons. In addition to the *Red Horn Cycle*, the narrative *Blue Horn's Nephews* indicates matrilineal principles at play in the late pre-conflict period of the Classic Horizon. In these narratives, men, usually esteemed warriors, marry chiefs' daughters and become chiefs themselves by virtue of these unions. The protagonists also practice matrilocality; they reside in their wives' villages after marriage and simply replace the chiefs whose daughters they have married. In *Blue Horn's Nephews*, we also see soral polygyny, as the warrior of the story marries the daughters of a chief and becomes a village chief himself. In these oral traditions, women have an ascribed status: they are born into chiefly families, and the ascension of a new chief is realized through marriages with them. Descent follows the female line as it does in all matrilineal systems. Men earn the right to marry a chief's daughter through brave deeds in battle and other significant accomplishments such as the foot race in the *Red Horn Cycle*. Therefore, men have achieved rather than ascribed status. In *Blue Horn's Nephews*, the sons of the new chief develop a particularly strong avuncular relationship with Blue Horn (their maternal uncle and the brother of the two sisters), a common attribute of many matrilineal systems. These matrilineal and matrilocal elements are also found in other Ho-Chunk oral traditions such as *The Chief's Daughter and the Orphan*, *The Thunderbird*, *The Man Who Visited the Thunderbirds*, and *The Woman Who Loved Her Half Brother*.[21]

Hierarchy is also evident in the Ho-Chunk oral traditions that relate to the earlier, pre-conflict period. In the *Red Horn Cycle*, Radin noted the elevated position of the chief's daughter on a platform to witness the foot race. In another version of the *Red Horn Cycle*, women present moccasins to the members of a war party, a sign that a woman will marry a warrior upon his triumphant return. The chief's daughter in the story first offers her moccasins to Red Horn, the most prestigious member of the war party, but he refuses. The next two warriors also reject her moccasins, and she is forced to offer them to Turtle, a figure in many Ho-Chunk oral traditions whose foibles make him the warrior with the lowest stock of prestige. He forcibly takes the moccasins from the chief's daughter thus coercing her into marriage, a turn of events that causes the chief's daughter great embarrassment. Red Horn, on the other hand, accepts the moccasins of an orphan girl, a person of lower rank than the chief's daughter. While this tale inverts the social order, it still presents a clear picture of the established hierarchy as orphans were seen to be the

edition (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2017), 185-96; Jung, *Misunderstood Mission of Jean Nicolet,* 26-35; James L. Theler and Robert F. Boszhardt, *Twelve Millennia: Archaeology of the Upper Mississippi River Valley* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 158-59; Charlevoix, *Journal of a Voyage to North-America*, 2:63.

[21] Staeck, "Echoing the Past," 96-107; John P. Staeck, "Chief's Daughters, Marriage Patterns, and the Construction of Past Identities: Some Suggestions on Alternative Methods for Modeling the Past," *Wisconsin Archeologist* 74 (March-December 1993): 378-81.

bottommost members of the community while a chief's daughter and the chiefly family to which she belonged were at the top. It also reflects both the importance of ascribed status (in this case, the high social standing of the chief's daughter), as well as achieved status, as the orphan girl becomes an impeccable wife and mother to Red Horn and his sons.[22]

Archaeological data provides additional evidence for the matrilineal nature of the earlier pre-conflict society of the Ho-Chunks. Archaeologists note that the Classic Horizon, associated here with the late pre-conflict period, witnessed the increasing importance of corn agriculture in contrast to the earlier Emergent and Developmental Horizons. Similar agricultural societies, particularly the contemporaneous Haudenosaunee and Wendats, were matrilineal, and like most matrilineal societies were also matrilocal. Therefore, husbands resided in the female-centered, extended-family residences of their mothers-in-law after marriage. Residential structures in matrilocal societies tend to be much larger than those in patrilocal societies. This is particularly true with societies that practice soral polygyny where co-wives tend to live in the same residence. Non-soral polygyny is often characterized by co-wives having smaller, separate residences. Residential structures from the Emergent and Developmental Horizons at various Oneota sites average 30.5 square meters, quite close to the 28.6 square meters found worldwide for structures in patrilocal societies. Residential structures of the Classic Horizon average 171.3 square meters, again quite close to the worldwide average of 175 square meters for structures in other matrilocal societies. Interestingly, residential structures grew smaller during the later Historic Horizon of the post-conflict era, suggesting a return to patrilocal residence. This phenomenon parallels the known transition of the Ho-Chunks and other Siouan nations that emerged from the Oneota tradition and practiced patrilinear descent and patrilocal residence after European contact.[23]

Later oral traditions preserved a record of the large, pre-conflict residential structures well into the twentieth century.[24] These and other traditions such as the *Red Horn Cycle* and *Blue Horn's Nephews* created a discernable set of symbols that, even during the post-conflict era, reminded the Ho-Chunks of the important role women played among their ancestors. Also important were the religious beliefs of the Ho-Chunks. Like their oral traditions, their spiritual beliefs and cosmology created a set of symbolic elements that included important feminine figures, particularly Moon and Earth, both of whom (along

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22 Staeck, "Chief's Daughters," 381-83.

23 David F. Overstreet, and Patricia B. Richards, eds., *Archaeology at Lac Des Puans: The Lake Winnebago Phase: A Classic Horizon Expression of the Oneota Tradition in East-Central Wisconsin*, Reports of Investigations No. 280 (Milwaukee: Great Lakes Archaeological Research Center, 1992), 146, 170, 194; R. Eric Hollinger, "Residence Patterns and Oneota Cultural Dynamics," in *Oneota Archaeology: Past, Present, and Future*, Report 20 of the Office of the State Archaeologist, William Green, ed. (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1995), 142-74.

24 Nancy Oestreich Lurie and Patrick J. Jung, *The Nicolet Corrigenda: New France Revisited* (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press, 2009), 87-89.

with the male figures Earth Maker, Sun, Morning Star, Disease Giver, Thunder, and Water Spirit) were considered major deities of the Ho-Chunks and part of the earliest strata of spirit beings common to many Siouan societies in North America. Earth played a particularly important role in shaping male behavior among the Ho-Chunks. As one Ho-Chunk, Warujáxega (Crashing Thunder, also known as Sam Carley Blowsnake), asserted, "Our grandmother, Earth, is a woman, and in (abusing your wife) you are abusing her."[25] This prohibition even extended to the women of their enemies. One nineteenth-century American observer, Indian agent Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, employing Victorian euphemisms, noted, "The Winnebago [Ho-Chunk] warriors say that chastity is, by their tribe, uniformly respected in war. They say that the Great Spirit has told them not to abuse the women."[26]

The Ho-Chunks' transition from their pre-conflict to their post-conflict society was an ethnogenesis despite the continuities between the two. The survivors of the devastating wars, possibility a mere three percent of the original pre-conflict population, took refuge on the western shores of Green Bay among their Menominee allies, an event recorded in both French sources and Ho-Chunk oral histories.[27] Sometime later, the survivors left their refuge among the Menominees, crossed Green Bay, and by 1669-70 resided at Red Banks, a point of high ground on the western half of the Door Peninsula of Green Bay.[28] Radin wrote over a century ago that the Ho-Chunks came together from earlier village bands (or remnants of them in the aftermath of the conflicts) that gathered at a single location, and these bands became the basis for patrilineal clans. Radin believed the Wolf clan had been the chiefly clan of the earlier, pre-conflict Ho-Chunk society, whereas the Thunder (or Thunderbird) clan provided civil leadership in the post-conflict era. The post-conflict Ho-Chunk clans were organized into two exogamous moieties, that of the Sky (*waŋgeregi herera*, literally, 'those who are above') and included the Thunder, Eagle, Hawk (or Warrior), and Pigeon clans. The Earth moiety (*manegi herera*, 'those who are below') included the Bear, Wolf, Water Spirit, Buffalo, Deer, Elk, Fish, and Snake clans. The origin narratives of these clans often include descriptions of their journeys to Red Banks, where

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[25] Paul Radin, "The Winnebago Tribe," in *Thirty-Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1915-1916* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923), 170, 285-88; Paul Radin, ed., *The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1920), 455 (qtd. 455).

[26] Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Information Respecting the History, Conditions and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, and Co., 1854), 53 (qtd. 53).

[27] For the French sources, see Potherie, "History of the Savage Peoples," 300; and Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, 73 vols. (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers, 1896-1901), 44:247, 55:183. For Ho-Hunk oral traditions recorded in the first half of the twentieth century, see Radin, "Winnebago Tribe," 55-58; and Lurie, "Winnebago Protohistory," 803-4.

[28] Arthur C. Neville, "Some Historic Sites about Green Bay," in *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1905* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1906), 150-56.

these Ho-Chunk clans first gathered. The Warrior and Buffalo clans, for example, claim to have come from certain lakes far to the south of Green Bay. Only the Thunder clan asserts its origin was at Red Banks.[29]

The residence of the Ho-Chunks with the Menominees in the immediate aftermath of their calamitous wars resulted in the Ho-Chunks adopting aspects of Central Algonquian social organization, particularly patrilineality and patrilocality. The Menominees appear to have also adopted elements of Ho-Chunk social organization. The Menominee moieties bear a striking resemblance to those of the Ho-Chunks, more so than to the moieties of any other Central Algonquian society. Also, the Thunder and Bear clans traditionally have provided the most significant leadership positions among both nations.[30] For the Ho-Chunks, there existed a dual system of leadership whereby civil chiefs came from the Thunder clan and members of the Bear clan provided chiefs who directed the police functions within Ho-Chunk villages. The privileges of these two clans, and the ranking of lineages within them, provide evidence of continued, if diminished, stratification among the largely egalitarian Ho-Chunks of the post-conflict period. Moreover, all Ho-Chunk clans became patrilineal on the Central Algonquian model. In addition to the Menominees, the Ho-Chunks also became more intimately engaged with other Central Algonquian nations, and this also exerted influence. Perrot noted that the Illiniwek made captives of many women and girls in their war against the Ho-Chunks, and these captives, after many years of residence among the Illiniwek, returned to their people. Perrot also noted increased intermarriage between the Ho-Chunks and the Central Algonquians and wrote, “Some of the Pouteouatemis [Potawatomis], Sakis [Sauks], and Outagamis [Meskwakis] have taken wives among them [Ho-Chunks], and have given them their own daughters.”[31]

The Ho-Chunks’ population remained small for the next century and did not exceed one thousand persons until the middle of the eighteenth century. As the population slowly recovered from the cataclysms of the seventeenth century, the Ho-Chunks moved south from Red Banks and expanded into regions formerly occupied by their pre-conflict ancestors and other Chiwere Siouan populations such as the Ioway. These regions included the Fox and Rock River valleys and the Wisconsin and Mississippi River valleys. By the 1820s, at least forty Ho-Chunk villages dotted the landscape throughout present-day Wisconsin and northern Illinois, and each retained the dual system of chieftainship established earlier. Euro-American observers noted that soral polygyny remained a

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29 Radin, *Winnebago Hero Cycles*, 45; Paul Radin, *The Social Organization of the Winnebago Indians, An Interpretation* (Ottawa, Ont.: Government Printing Bureau, 1915), 13-19; Radin, “Winnebago Tribe,” 57, 65, 213, 217, 220, 242, 245, 249, 327; Nancy Oestreich Lurie, “A Check List of Treaty Signers by Clan Affiliation,” *Journal of the Wisconsin Indians Research Institute* 2 (June 1966): 50; Charlevoix, *Journal of a Voyage to North-America*, 1:286, 2:61-64.

30 Richards, “Red Banks,” 245; Robert L. Hall, “Red Banks, Oneota, and the Winnebago: Views from a Distant Rock,” *Wisconsin Archeologist* 74 (March-December 1993): 31.

31 Lurie, “Winnebago,” 693-4; Potherie, “History of the Savage Peoples,” 300-1 (qtd. 301).

common practice into the early nineteenth century. One of these observers, federal Indian agent Charles C. Trowbridge, noted the particularly strong warrior ethos of Ho-Chunk men. He also asserted Ho-Chunk women accompanied the larger war parties and were "found to be very brave, and always take part in the battle."[32]

Also important to the transition from matrilineal to patrilineal kinship was the advent of the fur trade in the western Great Lakes and the establishment of French Jesuit missions. The fur trade necessitated smaller, more mobile villages over larger expanses of territory, and this favored patrilineality and patrilocality. The missionaries also contributed to the shift toward patrilineality. French Jesuits believed male-centered households to be a cultural norm, if not a biblical mandate. The fur trade had a much greater influence than the Jesuits among the Ho-Chunks, and it dramatically changed the roles of Native women in the western Great Lakes. Carol Devens summarizes these changes and writes:

> The orientation of many female tasks began to shift from the creation of a useful end product, such as clothing or tools, to assistance in the preparation of furs. Awls and bodkins that otherwise might have been used for sewing coats or breechclouts instead enabled a woman to stretch more furs and stretch them faster. Women were undeniably vital to the production of the furs that Europeans sought so eagerly - their scraping, stretching, and tanning of skins was essential to the process. No longer, however, did they participate as producers in their own right; rather, they were becoming auxiliaries to the trapping process.[33]

However, this seemingly thorough-going transition to patrilineality was never complete. Nancy Oestreich Lurie (like Radin, a Euro-American anthropologist), began her fieldwork among the Ho-Chunks in the 1940s and greatly added to the extensive ethnographic work of Radin a generation earlier. Lurie, more so than Radin, discerned traces of the earlier matricultural elements in the post-conflict Ho-Chunk society. She noted the Ho-Chunks had a robust avuncular tradition whereby a woman's brother often had a stronger relationship with his sister's children than with his own, a common characteristic of matrilineal systems. Lurie also explained anomalies that Radin attributed to cultural

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[32] Jeanne Kay, "The Fur Trade and Native American Population Growth," *Ethnohistory* 31 (1984): 278; Lurie, "Winnebago," 692-93; Samuel Mazzuchelli, *Memoirs Historical and Edifying of a Missionary Apostolic*, Mary B. Kennedy, trans. (Chicago: W.F. Hall Printing Co., 1915), 56, 100; Charles C. Trowbridge, "Comparison of the manners, Customs and international laws of the Win-nee-baá-goa nation of Indians with those of their neighbors, the Munnoáminnees," [1823], pp 120-21, 125-27, 131 (qtd. 127) in C.C. Trowbridge Papers, box 15, folder I4Me, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan.

[33] Lurie, "Winnebago," 692; Hollinger, "Residence Patterns," 155-58; Carol Devens, *Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 3, 13-20 (qtd. 17).

deterioration caused by the Ho-Chunks' later reservation experiences as elements of an earlier matrilineal system. She noted that while the Ho-Chunks were patrilineal, descent could, and often did, go through the female line. In cases where a mother's clan could better afford the cost of a naming feast, a child often assumed the clan identity of the mother rather than the father. The same was true of war bundles, important sacred objects among the Ho-Chunks. While the inheritance of war bundles went through the male line, a woman could inherit a war bundle if there was no qualified male heir. In the cases of both clan affiliation and war bundles, descent could follow the female line in special circumstances, but thereafter descent went through a woman's sons. Lurie argued this was the dynamic by which Hąboguwįga (Glory of the Morning) assumed leadership among the Ho-Chunks during the eighteenth century.[34]

This conclusion stands in marked contrast to that of Radin, who, as a male anthropologist in the first decades of the twentieth century, reflected the gender biases of his time. As a student of Franz Boas, the father of American cultural anthropology, Radin rejected older ethnocentric notions of unilineal cultural evolution, and, like Boas, sought to understand cultures on their own terms by determining their historical contexts through evidence internal to the cultures. Radin also firmly rejected overtly racist theories that linked cultural variation among human populations to racial and biological differences. Yet, despite his progressive and even radical notions concerning race and ethnicity, Radin was, according to his recent biographer, Jack Glazier, conservative in his assumptions about gender. Glazier writes, "Radin built strong relationships with several of the Winnebago [Ho-Chunks] with whom he worked, but none of those relationships was with women. His viewpoint was highly gender-constricted. He had little to say about Winnebago women, as informants or otherwise."[35] Thus, it should come as no surprise that in his assessment of Hąboguwįga, Radin dismissed the idea that she exercised any real leadership and argued instead that her status could be explained by "the fact that she married a Frenchman named Decora [*sic*]. She was not the chieftainess of the tribe nor were any of her children, strictly speaking, chiefs of the tribe. In any case her position had nothing to do with female descent."[36]

Examining the details of Hąboguwįga's life illuminates the cultural forces that led to her position of leadership among her people. Ho-Chunk oral traditions assert she was born in 1711 to a Ho-Chunk civil chief who was a member of the Thunder clan. At the time, the Ho-Chunk nation, still in the process of recovering from the disasters of the previous century, lived principally in a single village location at the entrance to Lake Winnebago on

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34 Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*, 141-46; Lurie, "Winnebago," 694-95.

35 Lurie and Jung, *Nicolet Corrigenda*, 142; Jack Glazier, *Anthropology and Radical Humanism: Native and African American Narratives and the Myth of Race* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020), 1-9, 46, 168-69 (qtd. 46).

36 Radin, "Winnebago Tribe," 193 (qtd. 193).

Doty Island (present-day Neenah, Wisconsin). Upon the death of her father in 1729, Hąboguwįga became the chieftess of the Ho-Chunk nation. Two versions of the oral tradition present different reasons for her ascension. The first, provided by the late Ho-Chunk elder and scholar David Lee Smith, asserts she was an only child. Another version recounted by the Ho-Chunk elder Carolyn Fiscus states instead that Hąboguwįga had brothers, but none were deemed worthy of succeeding their father. Both traditions agree that Hąboguwįga possessed a great deal of wisdom and a strong character, and that she exercised real leadership among her people. As archaeologist Roger C. Echo-Hawk reminds us, different versions of oral traditions do not undermine their value as historical sources, particularly when those traditions share core elements (in this case, Hąboguwįga becoming a chieftess) and mesh with documentary and archaeological data.[37]

Hąboguwįga's assumption of leadership caused some controversy among the Ho-Chunks as many rejected the idea of a woman assuming such a position. About half of the nation went westward to the Mississippi Valley in protest of the decision, although the rift ended, most likely by the early 1750s, when the dissenting faction reconciled with those who supported Hąboguwįga's role as chieftess.[38] She married a Frenchman, Joseph Sabrevoir Décarrie, who had resigned his commission as an officer in the French army in 1729 and became a trader among the Ho-Chunks. Hąboguwįga and Décarrie had two sons and a daughter. After seven or eight years, Décarrie returned to the colony of Quebec. Hąboguwįga insisted that their sons stay with her; their daughter accompanied Décarrie, who died in 1760 in one of the final battles of the French and Indian War. Ho-Chunk oral traditions maintain that Hąboguwįga exercised real leadership, which is evidenced by the fact she led her people in their campaigns against the Meskwakis in the Fox Wars during the early eighteenth century and against the British and their allies in the later French and Indian War.[39]

A skeptic like Radin would argue that Native oral traditions imperfectly record empirical knowledge of the past, and the assertion that Hąboguwįga exercised leadership as a chieftess stands as little more than a metaphor in the Ho-Chunk narratives that preserve knowledge of her career. Radin believed that any significance Hąboguwįga possessed was the result of her marriage to a French trader. Certainly, such nuptial unions had important

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37 Smith, *Folklore of the Winnebago Tribe*, 155-57; Carolyn Fiscus, pers. comm., 10 August 2021; Roger C. Echo-Hawk, "Ancient History in the New World: Integrating Oral Traditions and the Archaeological Record in Deep Time," *American Antiquity* 65 (April 2000): 267-90. Carolyn Fiscus's version is also recorded by Richard L. Dieterle. See Richard L. Dieterle, "The Glory of the Morning," 2005, par. 2, in *The Encyclopedia of Hočąk (Winnebago) Mythology*, Richard L. Dieterle, ed., accessed at https://hotcakencyclopedia.com/ho.GloryOfMorning.html.

38 Smith, *Folklore of the Winnebago Tribe*, 155-57; Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers: Indians, Métis, and Mining in the Western Great Lakes, 1737-1832* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 28; Lurie, "Winnebago," 694-95; Dieterle, "Glory of the Morning," par. 2, 14.

39 Smith, *Folklore of the Winnebago Tribe*, 156-57; Dieterle, "Glory of the Morning," par. 2-3, 14.

diplomatic and economic dimensions for Native communities in the Great Lakes, as historians have long argued.[40] However, are we to believe this was the only source of Hąboguwįga's renown?

The best contemporaneous description of Hąboguwįga comes from the writings of Jonathan Carver, a Connecticut Yankee who traveled in the western Great Lakes from 1766 to 1768 in the service of the British Crown. He arrived at Hąboguwįga's village in late September 1766 and wrote, "Here the queen [Hąboguwįga] who presided over this tribe instead of a Sachem [male chief], received me with great civility, and entertained me in a very distinguished manner."[41] Carver remained among the Ho-Chunks for four days and sat in one of their councils. His description leaves little doubt that Hąboguwįga occupied the office of chieftess with all its incumbent obligations and perquisites. Carver stated:

> The Queen sat in the council, but only asked a few questions, or gave some trifling directions in matters relative to the state; for women are never allowed to sit in their councils, except they happen to be invested with the supreme authority, and then it is not customary for them to make any formal speeches as the chiefs do.... Having made some acceptable presents to the good old queen, and received her blessing, I left the town of the Winnebagoes [Ho-Chunks].[42]

We should view skeptically Carver's assertion that Hąboguwįga gave only 'trifling directions' and that, despite the authority she wielded, her gender occasioned limits on her office, such as speaking in council. Ho-Chunk scholar Angel Mae Hinzo argues instead that Carver created "a narrative that imposes a settler lens of women's roles in leadership without an in depth understanding of Ho-Chunk society. From his description, Glory of the Morning [Hąboguwįga] stands more as a figurehead to be impressed and entertained for settler access to Ho-Chunk territory."[43]

Carver later expanded on his meeting with Hąboguwįga and described the cultural conventions by which she became a chieftess. He wrote:

> On the death of a chief, his sister's son sometimes succeeds him in preference to his own son; and if he happens to have no sister, the nearest female relation assumes the dignity [chieftainship]. This accounts for a woman being

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40 Radin, "Winnebago Tribe," 193; Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 28-29.

41 Jonathan Carver, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North-America in the Years 1766, 1767, and 1768* (London: J. Walter, 1778), 32 (qtd. 32).

42 Carver, *Travels*, 32-33, 38 (qtd. 32-33, 38).

43 Angel Mae Hinzo, "Voicing Across Space: Subverting Colonial Structures in Ho-Chunk/Winnebago Tribal History" (Ph.d. diss., University of California-Davis, 2009), 21-24 (qtd. 24).

> at the head of the Winnebagoe [Ho-Chunk] nation which, before I was acquainted with their laws, appeared strange to me.[44]

Interestingly, this passage is very similar to Lurie's description of how war bundles and clan affiliation often followed the female line in special circumstances:

> The occasional inheritance of war bundles in the female line was attributed to lack of qualified male heirs, and the naming and claiming of children by the mother's clan supposedly rested entirely on the mother's clan being better able to afford the cost of a naming feast. However, when a Winnebago [Ho-Chunk] woman married a White man, the traditional procedure used when a husband belonged to another tribe was required: the children were adopted by the mother's clan but thereafter clanship continued through her male descendants.[45]

Carver's text parallels much of what is recorded in the Ho-Chunk oral traditions, and while documentary sources must be handled in the same critical manner as oral traditions, the broad agreement between these two very different categories of primary sources cannot be cavalierly dismissed as mere coincidence. Carver's description in particular - the only contemporaneous description of Hąboguwįga - indicates she exercised real leadership. Civil chiefs of the Thunder clan among the Ho-Chunks lacked coercive power and governed largely through persuasion and moral example. Major decisions were made through national councils that included the heads of all the clans, and women, unless they were 'invested with the supreme authority' as Carver noted, did not participate. Hąboguwįga's participation clearly indicates she possessed such authority. Also important is the fact Carver was only allowed to proceed deeper into the Ho-Chunks' country after receiving the 'blessing' of Hąboguwįga. Thus, it is difficult to accept the assessment of Radin and other scholars who have argued Hąboguwįga was only a figurehead among her people.[46]

Moreover, Hąboguwįga's two sons went on to assume positions of village leadership and thus, as described by Lurie, reestablished descent through the male line after inheriting their Thunder clan identities from their mother and subsequently passing this clan affiliation to their children. Hąboguwįga's eldest son, Čugiga (Spoon or Ladle), became a village chief of one of the new villages in the Ho-Chunk domain at present-day Portage, Wisconsin. Her younger son, Čap'ósgaga (White Breast or Buzzard) established a village

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44 Carver, *Travels*, 259 (qtd. 259).

45 Lurie, "Winnebago," 694 (qtd. 694).

46 Carver, *Travels*, 33, 38 (qtd. 33, 38); Hinzo, "Voicing across Space," 21-26. For works that assert Glory of the Morning was a "figurehead," see Radin, "Winnebago Tribe," 163-65, 193, 209-10, 318; and Norman Gelb, ed., *Jonathan Carver's Travels Through America, 1706-1768: An Eighteenth-Century Explorer's Account of Uncharted America* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1993), 21 (qtd. 21).

near present-day La Crosse, Wisconsin. Later American settlers as well as French Métis residents who knew the two sons agreed both men were chiefs by virtue of their mother's lineage. Their descendants became numerous among the Ho-Chunks. Décarrie - spelled variously as Decora, DeKaury, DeCora, and Decorah - became a surname among the Ho-Chunks and remains one of the most common family names among both the Wisconsin and Nebraska branches to the present day. In some cases, Ho-Chunks with French ancestry, even if they could not trace their lineage back to Joseph Sabrevoir Décarrie, adopted one of the various spellings as family names.[47]

Hąboguwįga's life provides an excellent vehicle by which to apply Geertz's definition of culture to the Ho-Chunks and specifically examine how matriculture - or, more accurately, matricultures - became manifest throughout their history. Hąboguwįga was born into a society that had a wealth of symbols from which she and her people could draw. They had stories such as the *Red Horn Cycle* and *Blue Horn's Nephews* that indicated the matrilineal nature of their pre-conflict ancestors and how chiefly prerogatives descended through the female line. Of course, in none of these oral traditions did a female ever become a chief during the pre-conflict period. Nevertheless, a chief's daughter in the earlier oral traditions enjoyed an elevated social status, as did the entire family of a chief. That idea carried over into the post-conflict period as the Ho-Chunks built a new cultural configuration on the foundations of their earlier, pre-conflict society. If the oral traditions and cosmology did not provide a precedent for female leadership, they still provided what Geertz calls 'recipes': possibilities based on the extant symbolic systems. This included the passing of clan identities and sacred war bundles through the female line in special circumstances and important feminine deities such as Moon and Earth. The Ho-Chunks, confronted with the unique circumstance of a chief of the Thunder clan dying without a male heir (or unqualified male heirs, depending on which oral tradition is referenced), manipulated their various symbols (or 'ingredients' according to Geertz) and elevated a strong daughter to a position of leadership. We should also heed the observation of Guédon that elements of matriculture such as matrilineality and matrilocality are often not rigid cultural rules but serve instead as less formal, *de facto* practices. Guédon urges scholars to be aware of "those components of culture that sustain, express, and welcome women's participation in the socio-cultural fabric, whether it sustains a matrilineal kinship system or not."[48]

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47 Lurie, "Winnebago," 694-95; James H. Lockwood, "Early Times and Events in Wisconsin," *WHC*, 2:178; Augustin Grignon, "Seventy-Two Years' Recollections of Wisconsin," *WHC*, 3:286; John T. de la Ronde, "Personal Narrative," *WHC*, 7:347; George Gale, *Upper Mississippi: Or, Historical Sketches of the Mound-Builders, the Indian Tribes, and the Progress of Civilization in the North-West* (Chicago: Clarke and Co., 1867), 81.

48 Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 14, 44, 131 (qtd. 44, 131); Guédon, "Introduction," 5-7 (qtd. 7). Also see Linnéa Rowlatt, "Blind: The Western Gaze at Matricultures, Historically, Part I," *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 1 (May 2020): 18.

We should also remember that such elements do not always produce unanimity within cultures that share symbolic systems. As Geertz notes, individuals within cultures can interpret symbols and manipulate them in different ways, thus accounting for ideology. In other words, members of a culture may share common symbolic systems (which provide a model *of* social reality) but seek to apply them in divergent and often contrasting fashions (models *for* social reality). Certainly, the Ho-Chunks faced an unprecedented situation when their chief died with only a daughter as a potential successor. Some Ho-Chunks supported the idea of a female chieftess; others rejected this solution. Geertz writes "ideology is a response to strain…a loss of orientation that most directly gives rise to ideological activity, an inability, for lack of usable models, to comprehend the universe of civic rights and responsibilities."[49] This accounts for why part of the Ho-Chunks agreed to the elevation of Hąboguwįga to chieftess, while others initially did not.

The historic record of the early nineteenth century provides scattered references to Ho-Chunk women that reinforce much of what can been seen through the life of Hąboguwįga. One American observer, Caleb Atwater, observed in 1829 that the Thunder clan remained something like royalty among the Ho-Chunks, and chiefs' daughters retained a strong sense of their social position. Atwater wrote, "The daughter of a chief, never marries into a family below her's [*sic*] in dignity. The pride originating in birth, is as deeply seated in the hearts of those who are nobly descended, among the natives of the Northwest, as it is among the petty princes of Germany."[50]

One of the most prominent Ho-Chunk chiefs of this period was Hujopka (Four Legs), who was the chief of the same village where Hąboguwįga had lived a century earlier. Schoolcraft described Hujopka as "a stern chief at the outlet of Winnebago Lake, assumed to be the keeper of the Fox River Valley, and levied tribute, in some cases, for the privilege of ascent."[51] We do not know the name of Hujopka's wife; we do know that, while she may not have been a chieftess in the manner of Hąboguwįga, she still exerted significant influence among the Ho-Chunks, and many Ho-Chunk men respected her opinions. In 1827, Hujopka was part of a treaty council at nearby Lake Buttes des Morts. During this council with federal treaty commissioners, Ho-Chunk communities along the Mississippi River attempted a revolt against the United States and its settler colonial policies. Other Ho-Chunk communities debated whether to join the rebellion. Hujopka's wife argued against supporting the revolt, and the chiefs of the Fox River Ho-Chunks listened to her entreaties and did not join what became known as the 1827 Winnebago War. One of the treaty commissioners later recounted, "I saw one woman, the wife of the Chief, Four Legs

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49 Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 123, 219 (qtd. 219).

50 Caleb Atwater, *Remarks Made on a Tour to Prairie du Chien; Thence to Washington City in 1829* (Columbus, Ohio: Isaac Whiting, 1831), 100 (qtd. 100).

51 Henry R. Schoolcraft, *History of the Indians of the United States*, vol. 1, Francis Drake, ed. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1884), 375 (qtd. 375).

[Hujopka], at our council…who followed the Chiefs like a shadow, dissuading them from going to war with the United States. The reason of her fears, I found on inquiry, was in her knowledge of our power. She had been as far as New York."[52]

In the wake of the 1827 Winnebago War and the 1832 Black Hawk War, the federal government began an aggressive campaign to remove the Ho-Chunks to the west side of the Mississippi River. Many Ho-Chunks resisted. In the end, the United States removed about half of the Ho-Chunk nation westward; other Ho-Chunks resisted removal and remained in Wisconsin. The removal faction ultimately came to reside on a reservation in Nebraska. The anti-removal faction took up forty-acre homesteads in the 1870s and 1880s as a means of forestalling removal, and their homesteads functioned as reserved lands for the Wisconsin Ho-Chunks. The removal era brought about new challenges for the Ho-Chunk people, both men and women. Ho-Chunk historian Amy Lonetree, employing Gerald Vizenor's notion of 'survivance,' asserts that the Ho-Chunk people not only survived this period of settler colonial violence but actively repudiated it. In a powerful statement, Lonetree writes, "The word 'survival' does not sufficiently encompass the great strength, courage, and perseverance that it took for our people to remain intact as a tribal nation in the face of violence, colonial oppression, and policies of ethnic cleansing."[53]

A comprehensive examination of the removal and reservation periods is beyond the scope of this essay, but several works illustrate directions for future research. Feminist anthropologists have proffered novel approaches for conducting gendered analyses of the roles of Ho-Chunk women. In her 1961 edited autobiography of Xehaćiwiŋga (Mountain Wolf Woman), a Wisconsin Ho-Chunk, Lurie largely focused on the socio-economic roles of Ho-Chunk women and how these provided a foundation for a unique matriculture that lent an element of stability to their society. Women like Xehaćiwiŋga displayed a sense of equanimity that often eluded their male counterparts. According to Lurie:

> The sense of personal adequacy displayed by Mountain Wolf Woman [Xehaćiwiŋga] can be attributed to more than the greater continuity and stability of female roles. Cultural change has indeed affected the lives of Winnebago [Ho-Chunk] women, but in contrast to men, they have benefited

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52 Schoolcraft, *History of the Indians*, 376; Lurie, "Winnebago," 697; Thomas L. McKenney to James Barbour, 24 January 1828, Letters Sent by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881, Microfilm Publication M-21, reel 4, vol. 4, p. 267 (qtd. 267), Record Group 75, Records of the Office of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

53 Lurie, "Winnebago," 698-700; Amy Lonetree, "Visualizing Native Survivance: Encounters with My Ho-Chunk Ancestors in the Family Photographs of Charles Van Schaick," in *People of the Big Voice: Photographs of Ho-Chunk Families by Charles Van Schaick, 1879-1942*, Tom Jones, Michael Schmudlach, Matthew Daniel Mason, Amy Lonetree, and George A. Greendeer, eds. (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2011), 13-22 (qtd. 14).

> by the change to some extent. Their socially humbler roles have acquired greater economic power at the expense of the more prestigious male roles.[54]

In a recent historical assessment of her grandparents, Henry and Elizabeth Cloud, Ho-Chunk anthropologist Renya K. Ramirez provides two additional concepts by which to assess the roles of Ho-Chunk women. Henry Cloud was the first Native graduate of Yale University in 1909 and had a distinguished career in the service of Native people, as did his Ojibwe wife, Elizabeth Bender Cloud. Ramirez rejects the notion that the Clouds' engagement with the settler colonial culture rendered them 'inauthentic' as Native people, a common theme in earlier assessments. Ramirez asserts that such arguments are "based on static notions of identity in which one cannot be modern, Christian, and Native all at the same time."[55] Ramirez introduces the idea of 'doubleness,' a strategy employed by Ho-Chunk people in their battle against settler colonialism. Ramirez writes that "doubleness of speech was absolutely essential to speak the unspeakable without the colonizer's awareness. Thus, they must have learned how to tell stories embedded with criticism."[56] Elizabeth and Henry Cloud employed this strategy in various capacities, including their leadership roles in the Society of American Indians, an advocacy group organized 1911; and the American Indian Institute, an education institution founded in 1915. These and other organizations served as Native hubs, which, according to Ramirez, allowed the Clouds and other Native people to:

> maintain their tribal culture, community, identity, gender, and belonging in urban areas both in geographic space, such as through meetings and powwows, and virtually, not based in space, such as through phone calling, writing letters, reading tribal newspapers, and storytelling.... [T]he Clouds maintained connections to their tribes, tribal identity, community, and gender as well as developed Native-oriented strategies to challenge the U.S. and settler colonialism, away from their tribal homelands in Native hubs.[57]

In the case of her mother, a woman of Ho-Chunk and Ojibwe heritage, Ramirez notes Woesha Cloud North joined the Native occupation of Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay from 1969 to 1971. Ramirez writes, "I now realize that she was following her parents' example by joining a Native hub on Alcatraz Island and fighting for Native American rights."[58]

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54 Nancy Oestreich Lurie, ed., *Mountain Wolf Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), 100-1 (qtd. 100-1).

55 Renya K. Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power: The Lives of Henry Roe and Elizabeth Bender Cloud* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 4 (qtd. 4).

56 Ibid., 4-8 (qtd. 6).

57 Ibid., 2-5, 72-73, 98-120 (qtd. 5).

58 Ibid., 231 (qtd. 231).

The works of Lurie and Ramirez illustrate the changing nature of matriculture - and the development of various matricultures - over long expanses of time. The Ho-Chunk people provide a microcosm and template by which other Native nations can be examined to determine the various forces that shaped matricultures. Certainly, contact with Euro-American colonizers had a dramatic effect on all American Indians, but so did interactions, both peaceful and violent, with other Native societies. The matricultures established during the various epochs of Ho-Chunk history were unique, and each provided new sets of symbolic elements from which later generations could draw. Certainly, the dynamic nature of matriculture among the Ho-Chunks and other Native societies offers abundant scholarly possibilities. Hopefully, students of Native cultures will take up this challenge during the course of the twenty-first century.

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The Matrixiality of the Earth in the Basque Worldview

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Abstract

The prehistory of the Basques settled in the north of the Iberian Peninsula is a special mystery. Basque language, whose origins are still unclear, does not belong to the Indo-European languages. The latest ethnological and linguistic research into the origin of this language points to a pre-Indo-European ancestry. Like any medium, language is not merely a functional means of transmitting a message. It interprets the world, gives names to the world, and organises it according to the specific meaning of each language. For Basque, it can be demonstrated that the pre-Indo-European worldview does not correspond to the Indo-European patriarchal worldview. Despite controversial positions on the matriarchal organisational structures of the Basque people and their matricultural customs, researchers agree that Basque pre-Indo-European elements represent patterns strongly influenced by the mother archetype. Matrixial patterns in the symbolism of Basque culture and especially in language and mythology are features of pre-Indo-European culture. To refer to the pre-Indo-European elements of the Basque worldview, I will use the term matrixial *(Saratxaga). This is a philosophical category that designates the creative force of form and organisation into the world. The aim of this essay is to highlight the symbolic expressions of a Basque matrixiality and to present their meaning in the context of a cultural worldview. The article focuses especially on the matrixial character of the symbolic dimensions of the earth, taking into account animism and its own laws, with its spirits that inhabit it.*

Based on the work of the philosopher Andrés Ortiz Osés, who has given an interpretation of pre-Indo-European symbolism against the background of hermeneutic doctrine, the Basque matrixial elements will emerge here. The

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*research and contribution of Jorge Oteiza are of particular importance in this context. His approach has given an aesthetic interpretation to the Basque world horizon. According to Jorge Oteiza, emptiness as a fundamental concept of a non-differentiated unity where there are no separations, where creation and death form a unity, where heaven and earth are not yet divided (*zerulurra*: universe), is a special feature of Basque pre-Indo-European matrixial symbolism.*

Keywords: Earth, Basque matriarchalism, megalithic monument, animism, geo-cosmic force

Résumé

La préhistoire des Basques établis dans le nord de la péninsule ibérique demeure mystérieuse. La langue basque, dont les origines sont encore obscures, ne fait pas partie des langue indo-européennes. Les recherches les plus récentes suggèrent une origine pré-indo-européenne. Comme tout les média, une langue n'est pas seulement un moyen fonctionnel de transmettre un message, la langue interprète le monde, nomme ses composantes, et l'organise selon des modes spécifique à chaque langue. En ce qui concerne le Basque, on peut démontrer que la vision du monde pré-indo-européne qu'il supporte, ne correspond pas à la vision du monde patriarcale indo-européenne. En dépit des positions controversées sur les structures sociales matriarcales du peuple basque, de nombreux chercheurs sont d'accord pour dire que des éléments de la culture basque représentent des schémas fortement influencés par l'archétype de la Mére. Ces schémas matriciels constituent le coeur du symbolisme de la culture basque. J'utilise le terme 'matriciel' (Saratxaga) pour désigner ces éléments pré-indo-européens dans la vision du monde basque; le terme basque fait référence à une catégorie philosophique qui s'applique à la force créative dirigeant forme et organisation dans le monde. Le but de cet essai est de souligner les expressions symboliques de la matricialité basque, et d'en présenter leur signification dans le contexte culturel. Ce texte se concentre surtout sur le caractère matriciel des dimensions symboliques de la terre et des esprits qui l'habitent, en prenant compte de l'animisme et de ses lois.

Basé sur le travail du philosophe Andrés Ortiz Osés, qui nous a donné une interprétation du symbolisme Basque pré-indo-européen, à partir des principes de l'herméneutique, notre approche devrait voir émerger ses éléments matriciels. La recherche et les contributions de Jorge Oteiza sont d'une importance particulière dans ce contexte; son approche a produit une interprétation esthétique l'horizon du monde basque. Selon lui, le vide, en tant que notion fondamentale pour la conception d'une unité non-différenciée, sans séparation, où la création et la mort se rejoignent, où le

*ciel et la terre ne sont pas encore divisés (*zerulurra*: univers), est un trait spécifique du symbolisme matriciel pré-indo-européen basque.*

Mot-clés : la Terre, matriarcat basque, monument mégalithique, animisme, force géocosmique.

Introduction: In the Corridor of Coordinates

In the Basque Country there is a widespread belief that in certain places valuable treasures are hidden underneath the earth. *Urrezulo* is the name of a cave in Ataun, which literally means 'gold cave.' A golden hide is said to be kept in some cavity. The coordinates of the place where this treasure is located are never precisely specified,[1] because the routes taken by shepherds to get there are as vague as they are indeterminate.[2] In Platzentzia one can still hear: *ardiaren oñak agertuko du urezko palanka mendi oetan*[3] ('the sheep's hoof will discover a golden lever in these mountains').

> On the mountain Ereñusare is buried an *idinaru* (oxhide) full of gold; on that of Goikogane (in Arankudaga) a goatskin; and on Igozmendi, near Santa Eufamia (Aulestia), a golden bell (...); on the mountain Aritz in Leiza a *kutxa* (chest) full of precious metal (...); and on the mountain Aralar an *arillki* (yarn winch) of the same, belonging to Marimunduko (a subterranean genie living in the cave of the mountain Muru).[4]

The gold treasures are hidden, but not concealed. The coordinates show the way to the accumulation of golden hides located in the dark labyrinthine interior of the Earth, and with their help, its infinite body can be traversed. Moreover, they are points of reference to the location where the surfaces of heaven and earth meet. Earth and sky remain knotted together through these points, through which the cycle of time runs with day and night: "The blue sky is called *Ostri*. In it move the stars that, when they set in the west, enter the 'red seas' (*Itxasgorrieta*) to make their way through the subterranean world."[5]

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[1] Jose Miguel Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore* (Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1973), 22.
[2] Jose Miguel Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca* (Madrid: Minotauro, 1960), 81.
[3] Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 13.
[4] Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca*, 54.
[5] Ibid.

Figure 1: Coordinates anagram; © Jon Arkotxa Goikoa and Leslie Mackenzie: Intxixu ta Lezeko (Paris: GEU/Desclee de Brouwer, 1982), 38.

The passage through the coordinates is entrusted to the spirits. *Intxixu*, a tiny, mischievous, cunning, shrewd spirit, fully covered with dark hair, dwelling in the crevice of Arditurri (in Oiartzun), leads people through the crevice into the passage of coordinates.

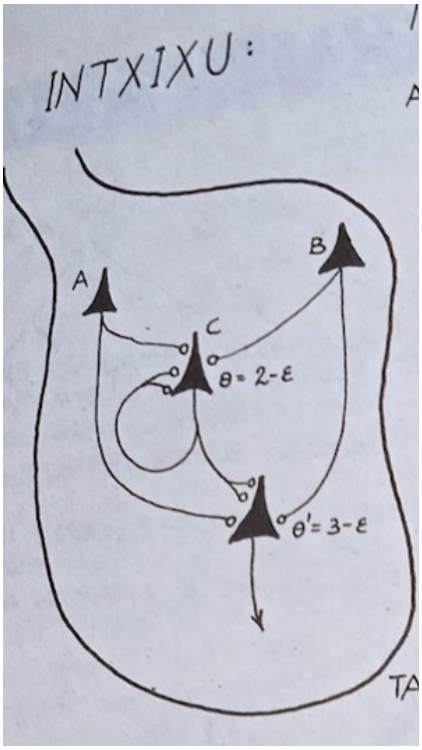

Figure 2: Coordinate mapping; © Jon Arkotxa Goikoa and Leslie Mackenzie: Intxixu ta Lezeko (Paris: GEU/Desclee de Brouwer, 1982), 23.

This work aims to address the symbolic order of the earth, insofar as it is central to Basque mythology. Here, the symbolic, economic, and animistic meaning of the body of the earth is presented along with the figures that animate it. This text follows the thesis of a naturalistic/animistic immanence in which symbolic order is based on a fundamental law (*logos*) that governs the body of the earth according to the law of equilibrium.

There is only the earth, whose body all beings inhabit and through which they are connected. Actually, one could speak about a Basque geo-cosmos, since the symbolic order of the Earth is the only one that shapes the horizon of meaning of Basque beliefs. Its order is determined by circular homeostasis, its laws being those of reciprocation, in that every giving is equal to a taking. The guardian of the balanced geosystem is Mari, the mistress of all genii, a female numen who guards the earth and ensures its circular organization.

Through this research, I will discuss the thesis of matriarchalism - a critical reformulation of the concept and theories of matriarchy based on Andrés Ortiz Osé's mytho-hermeneutics. The goal and purpose of this paper is to attribute the animistic Basque mytho-symbolism of the earth, characterized by strong immanence, to the category of matrixiality. Through a critical reading of Basque matriarchalism, I want to bundle the value system derived from the primary position of the earth within the Basque organization of culture (Geo-Organon) with a worldview determined by the matrixial power of formation.

METHOD: ARCHAEOLOGICAL, HERMENEUTIC AND AESTHETIC MATERIALS

The Research

The expedition through the corridor of coordinates began on an August day in 2021. Drawing on Jose Miguel Barandiaran's collection of materials attesting to the Basque worldview - a compilation of oral narratives, archaeological findings along with summarized ethnographic documents - I could set out for those places where the treasures of the female mistress of all genii, *Mari*, are kept, thus tracing the symbolic order of the Basque worldview shaped by mothers. The works of Andrés Ortíz-Osés on a collective unconscious associated with matriarchalism are considered the red thread of this expedition. The interpretation of a female numen, around whose symbolic order Basque mythologies revolve, is complemented and expanded by an aesthetic reading of Basque pre-Indo-European traces based on the artist Jorge Oteiza.

The first stop covers the Arantzazu-Aizkorri area in the northwest of the Pyrenees in the Basque Country, where Mari resides at their rock crevices and interior galleries. This is followed by several visits to the archives of the Koldo Mitxelena Library, where the complete works of the Basque archaeologist, anthropologist and ethnographer José Miguel de Barandiaran can be found. The third stop concerns the Aralar mountain range, whose crevices Mari inhabits and flies over. This area is particularly rich in

megalithic monuments that, according to archaeologists, anthropologists, artists and hermeneuticians of Basque culture, testify to a geo-philosophical belief system that this essay addresses in the context of a matrixial symbolism of Basque worldview.

The Witness

I set out on the course of coordinates with the help of three tools that relate to each other. The first tool consists in the collection of the material trace: megalithic statues, ethnographic testimonies and mythical narratives that the culture of the Basque region has left us. What do these materials speak to us about? What are they witnesses to? I would like to use two methods to shed light on the answer to these questions. One concerns hermeneutics (second tool) and the second aesthetics (third tool). The second tool is about the hermeneutics of sense (Hermeneutica del Sentido) by philosopher Andrés Ortíz-Osés. He has interpreted the ethnological, anthropological and cultural patrimony of the Basque culture as a symbolic order attributed to the mother and assigned to matriarchalism.

The third tool aims to consider the material traces beyond the projection surface of a cultural consciousness, as created testimonies by means of which Neolithic man bundled the sensory horizon of the earth. The Neolithic cromlech is supposed to represent the supreme creative act, whose plastic expression, according to the sculptor Jorge Oteiza, is emptiness. An aesthetic-religious reading of the void will thus connect to the Basque worldview of the earth.

The interacting triad between archaeology, hermeneutics, and art forms the methodological approach of this essay. Art bears witness to the creation of man as an individual and collective event to which material traces bear witness and whose consciousness bears witness to the hermeneutics of meaning.

Immanence of Basque Naturalistic-Animistic Worldview

Basque mythology is the main source of any talk about the matriarchal symbolism of Basque culture. Basque culture has not developed a general saga in the form of poetry, though, because it is mainly a practice based on oral tradition. Its justification therefore lies not in the saga recorded and handed down by the writer, in which the respective narratives of a generalized canon are bundled. José Miguel de Barandiaran collected, compiled, ordered, classified and assigned these narratives in the systematization of oral tradition to a documentary practice. However, he did not attribute to them either a narrative or a philosophical meta-level. Since the generalization of myths is due to their inscription in a metanarrative canon, I would rather avoid the term mythology. Instead, myths can be spoken of according to the original meaning of myth, ‘discourse, word, narrative.’ Shepherds and ladies tell stories that are about numen, genii, and other mythical creatures, which in turn tell something that neither shepherds nor ladies tell. Whether narratives of a second order

(those that tell about narratives) are subordinate to a general narrative structure is a subject of myth research. In contrast, I do not want to give myths a generalized structure, but to understand each individual narrative as a source of imaginary symbolism of a state of mind or as an expression of an ideal, corresponding to a particular ethnological group.

Admittedly, general characteristics are to be inferred. Barandiaran simply states that Basque myths have a magical and animistic milieu as their starting point.[6] In fact, neither cosmogonic nor eschatological narratives are to be found, since there are no stories of beginning or end. However, they speak about the course of natural phenomena and their effect on the horizon of senses perceived by man. Natural objects are animated by spirits and the phenomena flowing out of them are controlled by them.

Eguzki-Amandre (sun), *Odei* (thunder, storm), *Sugaar* (fireball) and others are animated forces of nature. There is an analogy with human beings, since both share one and the same nature: they are all spiritual beings, despite their difference of species as natural objects and human beings. According to this equality of their nature, the communication of people with nature and vice versa is open. Through magical procedures one can approach them or defend oneself against them. One defends oneself against *Odei* (spirit of the storm) by gestures and by showing *Uztaibedar* (celestial or rainbow grass); against "Mari's lightning" one shows her an axe or a hawthorn spike.[7]

In this respect, enchantment and magical practices are medial techniques to cross the interface between humans and animate nature (*natura naturans*). Animistic naturalism and magical communication are inferential world views of an ontology whereby beings share one and the same genus insofar as they are animate and their kinship is based on belonging to the earth, to one and the same body. In this respect, animistic and naturalistic worldviews are not positions to be contrasted with technological ones, according to the definition of these worldviews by hermeneuticist Andrés Ortiz-Osés.[8]

For magic is a technique of protection and intervention, whereby the transduction of forces crosses the threshold of the human soul and the spirit of nature. This technique creates bonds and connections between all beings inhabiting the Earth. The connection that can be made through the magical practices reveals an inner kinship of all the beings inhabiting the Earth. The inner interconnectedness corresponds to a structure of reality which I call immanence and which is confirmed by language. The popular statement *Izena duen guztia omen da* (Everything that has a name is) refutes the idea of a non-existence of what has no objective reality. As soon as a thing is named, it is present and exists, it has a place in reality. The existence of a thing is

[6] Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca*, 19.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Andrés Ortíz-Osés, *Los mitos vascos* (Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 2007), 19-20.

based on its name, because ontology (being) and language are not separated from each other.

Geo-Sophy: House, Spirit, and Law

*Earth-House (*Etxe-Lur*)*
According to the popular narratives collected by Barandiaran, the Earth is an infinite and immeasurable surface whose surface forms a horizontal plane, with reliefs of dry land and with the waters of the oceans.[9] The Earth extends both into the vastness and into the depths. Galleries and corridors cross the sacred and magical realm where opulence reigns: milk and honey flow through the vast region. Its interior is full of treasures, especially those made of gold, which is said to represent the vital energy of the universe. The cult of the earth comprises mainly in the admiration of a mysterious region where the treasures are hidden. Consequently, the worship cults are not carried out on the surface of the earth, where it is plowed and tilled, but in the grottoes, in the hollow surfaces that lead to the interior of the earth. Some wells, fissures, and caves are connected to them, like the Urbión well, the fissures of Omina and Albi, the caves of Amboto, Muru and Txindoki. Storm clouds and hurricanes emanate from these subterranean regions, announcing the arrival of Mari.[10]

The earth is the geo-cosmic space in which all beings are housed. It is the abode of all. Her infinite body retains that type of being whose general nature is to be animated by the power of the earth. Her interior is inhabited by spirits, mixed beings and genii; on the surface dwell men and all living beings, some of whom grow into the interior of the earth or come to the threshold of the interior and exterior of the earth's surface. The surface of the earth is perforated by caves, fissures and grottos. These are entrances and exits through which nature and human spirits pass through the earthly body in different directions and depths, and pass out over the spirits from the inside to the outside of the top layer of the earth's body. There are several generic names by which the Basque language designates those crevices of the earth through which the genii visit the world of men and the latter descend into the inner worldliness of the earth. Here are some of them: *Leiza*, *Leza*, *Zolo*, *Lesa*.[11]

The passages that lead into the earth are connected to the house in particular. As Barandiaran notes, "The Amunda ravine is connected to the kitchen of the farmhouse of the Saaltse, especially in the oldest houses such as Gaztelu (in San Martin de Arberua), Jauregia (in Ezpeleta), Semeola (in Alzola), Egana (in Aizarna), the kitchens are connected (*to the ravine*) with passages."[12] Above the hearth, where the warmth of the fire brings people together and feeds them, is the passage to the inner ways of the earth. *Etxe* (house) resembles the geo-cosmic space, but in the measure of man.[13] *Etxe*

[9] Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca*, 54.
[10] Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 11.
[11] Ibid., 22.
[12] Ibid., 14.
[13] Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca*, 81.

is land and shelter, temple and cemetery, material support, symbol and common center of the living and deceased members of a family. The main forms of life and the whole mythological and religious system that establishes and ensures the community of the living and the deceased developed in close relation to the *etxe.*[14] Each *etxe* bears the name of all the inhabitants, ancestors and those who are currently present. The house is managed by an *etxeko-andre* (mistress of the house). She takes the host of the house by the hand, and with lights she illuminates the deceased and brings them food. She maintains the household and is responsible for managing all the important institutions of the Basque social system.

Spirits of the Earth

The cohesion of communal organization of the Basque house (also called *bazerri*), beyond its social and economic level lies in its religious foundation, starting from the ancient Latin *rem ligere*, 'to bind a thing (or a project)'.[15] The house, apart from its inhabitants, is inhabited by ancestors from whom there is a blood or spiritual descent. In the traditional Basque house, the ancestors had a seat (*yarleku*); this was transferred to the Church with the Christianization of the country.[16] Thus, their presence in the house is taken into account and they are given great reverence.[17]

Besides the chasms bridging ancestral souls, numerous spirit beings circulate in the inner channels of the earth. From Aizkorri to Aralar they pass through underground paths, across the earth's crevices and chasms.[18] They are numen, zoomorphs or spirits seated in natural objects. Each of them is attributed a name. They are neither fictitious nor imaginary forces, but according to the previously quoted saying 'Everything that has a name is,' they inhabit the same reality as humans. *Gaurko*, the night-lighting genie who appears in the form of a cow or a lion,[19] *Inguma*, *Aideko*, and *Gaizkine* are at first sight malevolent spirits who are associated with diseases, the cause of which is not known. *Marmarro* and *Galtxagorri*, very tiny genies who help people in manual activities; *Maide*, a genie who enters the kitchen through the fireplace and hearth and receives the gifts left there for her. She is also in charge of building Cromlech together with *Intxixu*. *Sorgin* is a nocturnal genie and protector of birth.[20] *Ireltxu*, *Tartaro*, *Tartalo*, *Antxo*, *Iona gordi*, and *Sugaar* are all expressions for genii of subterranean regions. *Lamiak*, this beautiful girl with chicken feet, is the companion of the mistress of all genii and guardian of the laws of the earth: Mari. Of special importance are spirits that take the form of wild animals: *Zezengorri* (red bulls), *Bigorri* (red heifers), rams, sheep, goats, pigs and dogs are seen in several gorges, as in Leiza-Suloa. Barandiaran writes, "In Ataun, it was believed that in the gorge called Ituriozko-leizea, which opens in a mountain near the village of Iturioz, lives a red calf (...) It is said that

[14] Ibid., 56.
[15] Theodor Bergmann, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der lateinischen Vokabel re(l)ligion* (Marburg: Typoskript, 1984), S. 74-77.
[16] Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca*, 57-58.
[17] Ibid., 60.
[18] Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 14.
[19] Ibid., 20.
[20] Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca*, 71.

in the Omina gorge (Araba) lives a golden calf guarded by witches and monsters (. ...) The most famous underground monster in the legends of Goieri (Gipuzkoa) is the *Iraunsuge*, whose description by the villagers coincides with that of the dragon."[21]

Mari: Woman Wrapped in Fire

Mari has different names depending on the topology and the destination of those places where she has been seen. Because of her appearance, which is fleeting and quick like lightning, she is respected in several places, so that there are quite a few places and villages that bear the name of Mari.[22] In Durango she is called *Anboto Dame*, in Zenarruza *Anbotoko Semorie*, in Goierri *Muruko Damea*, in Ataun *Marimunduko* and *Sugara*, in Segara *Aketegiko Damea*; *Marije-Kobako* (in Markina), *Marimunduko* (in Berasategi), *Maya* (in Oiartzun), *Majue* (in Azkoitia). Crossing the air of the Basque Pyrenees as it moves from one pit to another, from Aizkorri to Anboto to Gorbeia. Mountains, caves and crevices are Mari's abodes. She crosses the celestial space in the form of a fireball in the direction of the Aralar Gorge, Aizkorri,[23] and so she flies over all these mountains like lightning. In the words of Baradiaran:

> In Zurzo de Gamboa they claim to have seen the woman of Anboto crossing the air in the form of a crescent of fire and carrying it in the direction of Navarre[24] (...) The description of the woman of Aketegi, which I heard from the mouth of a peasant from Segura, reminded me of the strange phenomenon known in meteorology as ball lightning.[25]

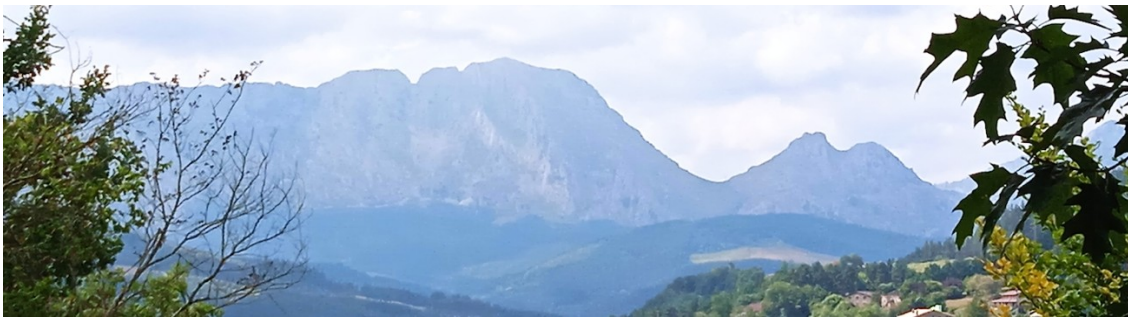

*Figure 3: Legend: The habitual abode of the Lady of Anbot (*Anbotoko Dama*) is a precipice in the mountain of the same name. The relief of this mountain illustrates Mari's outline.*

Mari also shows up in the form of a hybrid being. Her anthropomorphic femininity can be seen on her upper body. She appears as a beautiful woman, but with zoomorphic and plant representations of the lower body.[26] While her upper human appearance always remains the same, her lower animal form changes according to the season and

[21] Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 20.
[22] Jose Miguel Barandiaran, *Diccionario Ilustrado de mitologia vasca y algunas de sus fuentes* (Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1972*)*, 280.
[23] Ibid., 288.
[24] Ibid., 290.
[25] Ibid., 291.
[26] Ibid., 370.

region in which she is seen. As a deer she was observed in Aketegi and even as a horse in Oñate; her representation as a woman with bird and goat feet is also known. Her figure in the form of a tree also appears in a legend in Oñate.[27]

Mari's representability is equated to the symbolism of telluric forces of nature.[28] Without wanting to deny this analogy, I see in the species intersection of man/animal/plant-woman a clear metaphor to express one and the same origin. This can be understood as a representation of incest, which, given a mother archetype that is subordinate to the father, ascribes to heaven subordinate, telluric, hidden, and thus irrational, and forbidden values. The zoo-, phyto-, and nature-shaped figure of the female numen Mari expresses, in my view, the filiation of all species via a female lineage/uterine descent respectively. Animals, plants and humans are related and assigned to one and the same genus. As a natural phenomenon, Mari takes the form of a creative force, a force of formation that binds, unites, disperses, forms. This is embodied in the symbolic order in a female natural phenomenon whose modes of formation seem to be mutable, but the genus inherent in her remains unchanged. This can be clearly seen in her anthropomorphic form, yet her human appearance seems to radiate a tremendous beauty. Her beauty is admired by the boys and girls, i.e. children, but terrifies the shepherds and priests. Dressed in a golden robe, she combs her golden hair. Barandiaran tells:

> One day a shepherd came to the entrance of the terrible cave that opens in the eastern part of the Aketegi ridge. He had heard that Mari lived in this dark cave and that she could only be seen when she went out to comb her beautiful hair or when she turned into fire and crossed the sky.[29]

The caves inhabited by her are richly decorated and covered with gold and precious stones. In Zegama it is said that in the cave of Aketegi her room is furnished with golden beds. In Zarauz it is said that Mari winds thread with a golden spool. She turns coal into gold. She holds a palace of gold in her hands[30]. Her visible elegance seems to be a praiseworthy attitude.

Law of the Earth

The Tribute that Mari Collects

Underlying the animistic and magical organic geo-cosmos, above all, is the view that the whole earth is an animated organism. The Basque animistic worldview has a name for the inner earth life force, a kind of geo-cosmic force from which all beings inhabiting the earth are descended and which sustains itself during ceaseless creative evolution. This force is called *Adur*, is determined as female and stands for life

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 371.
[29] Ibid., 299.
[30] Ibid., 289.

energy.[31] The word denotes a creative and formative force attributed to the development of each organism. Thus the nature of the respective spiritual beings appears as nothing else than morphogenetic variations of one and the same life energy, a mystical force imaged as natural force, causing storms and drought.[32]

In Adur's service is Mari, the mistress of all genii. As mistress of the earth, her mission is to keep the inherent energy of the earth in equilibrium. She is to ensure that there is a balanced flow of energy on earth by enacting laws and taking action to keep the geo-energy. She maintains justice on earth by ensuring a state of equal measure among all Earth's inhabitants. With appropriate actions, she triggers strong storms or causes a long period of drought.[33] Such meteorological disastrous events are not to be considered as punishments, but they are rather epiphanic interventions of Mari, through which she balances the entanglement of forces brought about by all the species inhabiting the Earth, i.e. provides for the economy of equilibrium. Her measures and judgments are serve as a guarantee for the self-preservation of the earth. Therefore, Mari symbolizes justice, a being that secures and enacts the just law of the earth. She uses a technique of regulation: that of double negation.

Technique of double negation
As a fireball, Mari flies over the Basque part of the Pyrenees looking for the negated. In a narrative collected by Barandiaran it says:

> On a certain occasion, the lady of Anboto was asked where her companions were. *Elgoiabaren ezaren bila* (in Elgoibar, looking for the negation, negation, denial), she answered. A shepherd owns a hundred sheep, but is said to have counted only ninety. After the ten that he lacks, the Lamias set out. Therefore, the companions of the woman of Anboto went to Elgoibar.[34]

Another story says that a shepherd who went to Anboto to ask Mari about something was received by her with great affection and given an excellent cider. She explained to him that it was cider that had been given to the bow (*ezari emanado sagarduak zirala*). In these passages, negation is not opposed to affirmation. The negation indicates a state that has not been taken away from reality, but rather, those apples that have been denied to the owner have been left to negation. Just like the ten sheep that have been denied. For the shepherd they are taken away, disappeared.

Eza (the negation) is the main source of income for the Lamias. Their and Mari's supply consists of what was taken away from the shepherds and ladies. This is their tax, their tribute. Thus, the economy of that relationship (*harremana* = to take [*hartu*] and to give [*eman*]) is balanced in the equilibrium of taking and giving, insofar as what has been taken is given to him - or what has been given to denial is excluded from denial.

[31] Andrés Ortíz-Osés, *El matriarcalismo vasco* (San Sebastian: Txertoa, 1982), 20.
[32] Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca*, 80.
[33] Barandiaran, *Diccionario Ilustrado de mitologia vasca*, 279.
[34] Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 17.

Mari denies her loss and she sets out, together with her companion, in search of the ten sheep given over to denial. Thus, the saying goes, *ezai emanak*, *ezak eraman* (that which is given to the negation takes away negation).

Nothing is lost, nothing is denied, everything is transformed within the cycle of life and death. For this purpose, Mari uses double negation: the denial of negation is followed by the affirmation of what has been denied and failed. The technique of double negation thus stands for the affirmation of all that is present and lost. According to Mari's conception of the world, nothing is removed from reality, nothing is lost, nothing is rejected and denied. Mari takes care to call up the memory of loss and to save it from its denial. She herself takes what has been denied and transforms it into the most precious treasures, to which one must walk underground paths.

Moreover, Mari introduces what has been rejected, what has been stolen, what has been lost into the cycle of relations (giving/taking) in such a way that a balance of the geosystem is created. Mari is considered as a great transformer and alchemist, where nothing is lost, rather all things existing on earth are subject to the law of transformation. The losses concern most precious treasures that remain veiled in the reservoir of the inner earth. The negation here is a source of wealth, a reservoir. Mari's location is one of wealth, abundance, lushness, a reservoir of powers. Again, the golden room of Mari in the caves denotes the introduction (re-entry) of negation and the transformation of losses into gains, lushness. The lost is recalled. One must only be able to see with golden eyes.

Falling into the paradox tertium non datur
With denial and affirmation (*ezagaz eta baiegaz*), Mari procures her goods. This is a clear logical paradox, since it is simultaneously about denied and affirmed goods. The matriarch theorist Andrés Ortíz-Osés interprets this ontological determination of negation as a fundamental structure of telluric cultures, whose model can be equated with chthonic archetypes. I see, on the contrary, a clear case of *tertium non datur*, that is, of an ontological paradox par excellence, whereby something is and is not at the same time. Underlying the order of Being in Western metaphysics is a logical structure that assumes only two values: being or not-being. The logical bivalence is in turn based on a tautological univalence, in that being is attributed to the highest value, the good, the best; namely, God's attributes. From the negation of being, non-being is inferred. In this tree-like logical and metaphysical structure, the third value is excluded, insofar as it has a paradoxical effect.

Nevertheless, Mari is still on the *yes* and *no* side (*ezagaz eta baiegaz*), says a report by Kortezubi.[35] The paradox of the third genus is the basis of an immanent ontology, whereby ontogenetic and phylogenetic developments and transformations take place on one and the same surface: on an earth without hierarchically split off zones, like the under-earth subordinate to the earth, like the sky superior to the earth. From this follows an order of being in which all beings are equal and not assigned to a highest

[35] Barandiaran, *Diccionario Ilustrado de mitologia vasca*, 297.

category of the good, the most beautiful, and the best. It shows that reality is a process of transformation in which things are and at the same time are not; everything that has a name is, although it does not exist.

For an Ethics of the Negation of the Negation
Mari's companion intervenes where the balanced give-and-take, the law of the relationship as a rule of reciprocity, is distorted.[36] Mari condemns the abuse, that is, the wrong or exaggerated use of human-spiritual will, in that greed which wants to place itself above the laws of the earth. Lying, stealing, pride and boasting, disrespecting people, the greed of those who want to enrich themselves by digging such treasures (as happened in the mountains of Irikutzeta and Auza and in the fields of Arranzelei) are punished. Mari is the alchemist and the guardian of justice, for it is through her intervention that the economy of utility is in equilibrium, so that the abundance of the earth is fair to all. Her commandments are not subject to any prohibition,[37] but rather a universal equality of all forces.

Excursus: Basque Matriarchalism in Discussion

"We are inclined to consider it (the numen Mari) as a symbol of the earth."[38] With this simple statement, Barandiaran attributes an earth symbol to the anthropo-, zoo-, and phyto-morphic natural force Mari. In another place, going into the interpretations of the earth in Basque mythologies and tales, he himself states that the "earth is the mother of the sun and the moon."[39] Barandiaran's work is known for its high discretion in discursive speech about any interpretation of the materials. From a strictly scientific methodological point of view, that speculative statement about hypotheses which cannot be proven falls out of his work, so he does not dare to attempt to draw discursive conclusions from his detailed documentary work. The philosopher Andrés Ortíz-Osés accepted the challenge of giving an interpretative framework to the ethnological, anthropological and archaeological materials left behind and documented:

> Earth appears explicitly as Mother Earth in Basque mythology itself; but her final verification as such (*Ama Lur*) appears clearly when she is personified in Mari, the Mother Goddess.[40]

The spirit of the earth, whose inner force animates and binds everything on earth, place and seat of all beings, mother of the moon and the earth is, according to Ortiz Osés, synonymous with a goddess, a mother-goddess,[41] whose representation confirms Mari as mistress of all genii. He has for the first time given meaning to the

[36] Ibid., 379.
[37] Ibid., 378.
[38] Ibid., 380.
[39] Barandiaran, *Mitologia vasca*, 54.
[40] Ortíz-Osés, *El matriarcalismo vasco*, 26.
[41] Ortíz-Osés, *La Diosa Madre*. (Madrid: Trotta, 1996), 63-64.

archetype of the great Basque mother Mari and has dared to attempt to conceptualize Basque culture as a whole within the anthropological-hermeneutical horizon of matriarchalism.[42] He however rejects the theories of a general matriarchy. The philosopher attributes to the Basque collective unconscious a matriarchal-naturalistic and communally defined worldview, in contrast to a patriarchal, rationalistic and individualistic.[43] In this regard, he denies that a matriarchy emerged in the Basque Country, because he distances himself from the term matriarchy as an explanation of female domination in the organization of a social system. On the contrary, by matriarchalism he means a psychosocial structure characterized by the mother archetype. Ortíz Osés speaks of a structural substructure or substructures following Claude Lévi-Strauss' structuralist analysis of a social system, which signifies the value system of the respective group.

> The matriarchal typology would offer the following deep substructures that are intertwined: 1) Psychopathic substructure: the society in question revolves around the archetype of the Great Mother as a representation of the forces of nature, while the mythical figure of the goddess Mother Mari finds its concrete embodiment in the real Mother Woman. Matricentrism or matrifocalism; 2) Social substructure: heredity and kinship are transmitted through the female line; 3) Symbolic-linguistic substructure: language itself, in its original interpretation of reality, offers a distinctive assignment of the matriarchal-feminine; 4) Spiritual substructure: spontaneous communalism versus guilt-ridden individualism.[44]

In order to subordinate all these characteristics - communalism, naturalism and priority position of women in the institution of the house[45] (Greek: *oikos*) - to matriarchalism, he uses the method of mythohermeneutics, according to which myths express a symbolic order. Myths, according to the hermeneutic school, do not claim truth, just as hermeneutics is not to be understood as exegesis or the art of interpretation. The main point is that myths and narratives are given a symbolic value that weaves the depth or substructures of a culture.

That all this is attributed to the worldview of matriarchalism is due to the fact that Ortíz-Osés sees in the earth the symbol of the maternal archetype. The analogy 'mother equals earth' corresponds to a second one, in that he equates Mari, the guardian of the earth and mistress of all genii, to a goddess. The hermeneuticist follows the interpretation, going back to Carl Gustav Jung, of the symbolic representation of a mother archetype. In this respect, for Ortíz Osés mistress seems to mean mother, so that Mari coincides as a spiritual image of the mother of a goddess.

It seems to me that the equation 'mistress = mother = goddess' is shaped by structural conditions of a culture. The generalization of attributes of dominance assigned to

[42] Ortíz-Osés, *El matriarcalismo vasco*, 9.
[43] Ibid., 11.
[44] Ibid., 10-11.
[45] Ibid., 51.

female figures to an archetypal mother seems to me to go back to the representation in the male unconscious of a childbearing, fertile, protective woman and mistress of the house. Is a mistress a mother? Why should Mari, the pure metaphor of a natural force taking various forms, be associated with a goddess? In my opinion, the equation of mother (as signifier of the earth) and goddess (as mistress of all genii) is a form of the ideological discourse that maintains the dualistic anthropological schema father/mother, whether for its affirmation or negation. That is, its affirmation is seen in an expression of the claim to a suppressed *natura naturans* and negation in the historiography that deals with the patriarchal worldview. The symbolic values attributed to the archetype mother were not subjected to anthropological-ethnological or critical analysis, neither by the Eranos circle nor by the hermeneuticist Ortiz-Osés.

Ortiz-Osés' mythohermeneutic studies follow the method of the hermeneutic school, which uncritically advocates an idolatrous view of a mother archetype based on two basic schemes. First, the mother archetype opposes the patriarchal archetype, so that the representation of the mother is derived from the negation or opposition of the patriarchal.[46] Secondly, the mother archetype forms the very first stage of alienation of any ontogenetic development, whose return to the maternal body is frowned upon, according to a worldview that corresponds with the domination of male organization of the libidinous economy. According to this scheme, the maternal is assigned a symbolic order equal to nature, according to which it is established as an archetype opposed to culture. I would like to raise the objection that interpretations of the archetype mother follow the structure and genesis of the historiography and cultural historiography of the modern Occident, in that, among other characteristics, a patriarchal symbolic order dominated by rationalist self-assertion is preceded by a pre-rational culture dominated by women and emphasizing the maternal archetype.

> This individualized, already patriarchal view finds its parallel in the corresponding evolution of collective man from a private, tribal, magical, and 'irrational' life to a later civilized, rationalized, state-like way of life.[47]

Whether the testimonies of Basque cultural materials collected by Barandiaran correspond to a conception of the world dominated by the mother archetype depends on what characteristics one assigns to the same as established from a patriarchal point of view. With this question we can observe a methodological problem that postcolonial sciences had to contend with in the light of anthropological and ethnological facts. That means in our case: how to determine matriarchy when the mother concept of the patriarchal worldview is fundamental and functional? Likewise, the equation ‘Mother = Earth = Goddess = Mari’ is based on associations with archaeological materials of the Stone Age mixed with the narratives of the Basque cultural heritage that were collected only at the beginning of the twentieth century.

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[46] Andrés Ortíz-Osés, *Antropologia vasca. Simbolos, mitos y arquetipos* (Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1980), 139-141.
[47] Ortíz-Osés, *El matriarcalismo vasco*, 29.

> On the one hand, we think that the Basque mythology around the Great Mother Goddess Mari should be associated with this matriarchal-agrarian Basque culture, since our mythology corresponds to other matriarchal mythologies as well as to the cult of the Great Mother Goddess MA in the Neolithic Euro-Asian context.[48]

This statement assumes that the figurines called 'Venus' represent a maternal deity. As far as the equation of Mari with the Venus figurines[49] of the Paleolithic in the Euro-Asian region is concerned, one must assume the symbolic interpretation of such figurines. This is still unresolved in research, since the conferral of meaning on female-demarcated artifacts of the Paleolithic remains an unresolved issue.[50] Second, an agrarian culture is not present in the Basque Country to the same extent as in cultures in the Euro-Asiatic context. The cult of the earth is practiced in the rocky mountains of the Pyrenees, not in fields used for agriculture. Transhumance, pastoralism, and fishing in the sea were the main sources of an economy of subsistence that supported home consumption from regional gardens. Cultivation was carried out on small family plots,[51] so conditions there could not resemble the cult of the matriarchal female world present in the Euro-Asian region in connection with early Neolithic agriculture.[52] In fact, we see the turn from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic, characterized, among other things, by the fact that man carries out a revolution based on the domestication of animals and crops. Thus, an agricultural-matriarchal experience of the Basque Neolithic cannot be confirmed.[53] Moreover, no trace of female representations is found in the Basque Neolithic, rather they are encountered in the golden age of megalithic monuments as dolmens, menhirs and cromlechs. The origin of the female numen Mari is also unknown; it is not known whether she originates from the golden age of megalithic monuments or if her narrative was subject to oral tradition. Her attributes are neither those of fertility nor those of procreation.

Earth: The Surface on which the Cycles Close

The mountainous conditions of the Pyrenees were the reason for the preservation of local culture in the Basque Country for thousands of years. The Neolithic period brought about a revolution in economic practices and social organization in regions bordered by rivers, such as the Near East and the Mediterranean. Agriculture, animal husbandry, and sedentarism, among others, were new production and living practices that gave rise to the first advanced civilizations. While one can speak of highly developed civilizations developing *circa* 2000 BCE in the Fertile Crescent, the first

[48] Ibid., 12
[49] Andrés Ortíz-Osés, *La Diosa Madre*, 66.
[50] Arantzazu Saratxaga Arregi, „Allometrische Kunst. Weiblich demarkierte Artefakte in der Altsteinzeit," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, forth coming.
[51] Jose Miguel Barandiaran, *Vasconia Antigua. Tras las huellas del hombre* (Bilbao: La gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1978), 295.
[52] Ortíz-Osés, *El matriarcalismo vasco*, 26.
[53] Ibid., 36.

megalithic monuments were erected in the Basque Pyrenean region. They are considered funerary monuments.[54] These are cairns driven into the ground, rising to a certain height. A crypto-matriarchal totemism[55] can be deduced from the megalithic constructions, assigned by Andrés Ortíz-Osés to the Basque collective unconscious. He bases his hypothesis on animistic-magical naturalism, whose body of evidence is the central interpretation of the earth and its goddess Mari. It characterizes the communal and magical union through mystical participation in the same spirit, emblem, symbol or totem that for Ortíz Osés is embodied in Mari. I would nevertheless locate the participation in the communal and earthly order exemplarily in the megalithic monuments. On the one hand, because the Basque word for burial place, *baratze*, is about gardens and gathering places where the community unites in mystical communion, separating itself from those who do not belong. On the other hand, because all the inhabitants of the earth constitute a kinship by means of their participation in the earthly creative power.

The Cycle of Becoming: The Touch of Death and Life
The cycle is the law of the earth. The guardian of the earthly cosmos (geo-cosmos), the guardian of the laws of the earth, the regulator of its geo-homeostatic course transforms swag into gifts, she changes losses into profits, she turns fur into gold, she converts lack into abundance. As embodiment of transformations of those natural phenomena, she shows, together with all immortal genii, the processual course of that development. Death, according to the Basque geocosmic view, means a mere snapshot of that transformation. Birth and death, beginning and end, close according to the law of the earth and the cycle of the time closes in the earth. Beginning and end, both poles of the illusory idea of a linear arrow of time, can be connected and that formed junction marks that coordinate recorded in the earth.

Megalithic statues in the Basque Pyrenees and the cult of the community
Stones are neither inanimate materials nor do they belong to the past. Because the stones were erected for life and the narratives are transmitted, they speak of life and its phenomena. Aiming at the pure objectivity of science, the archaeologist José Miguel de Barandiaran, to whom we owe much of the research and documentation of prehistoric monuments, renounces any interpretation of his collected findings.[56] This does not mean, however, that he ignores the connections between archaeology, ethnography and mythology. In fact, despite his great reluctance to interpret the finds in any way, he elaborates the relationship of the megalithic statues to a Basque state of mind.[57]

All the early constructions known in the Basque Pyrenees date from the Late Neolithic or from the Copper Age around 2000 BCE.[58] Caves were used as dwellings and burial

[54] Barandiaran, *Vasconia Antigua. Tras las huellas del hombre*, 280.
[55] Ortíz-Osés, *El matriarcalismo vasco*, 46.
[56] Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 140-151.
[57] Barandiaran, *El hombre prehistórico y arte rupreste en Espana*, (Bilbao: Junta de Cultura de Vizcaya, 1962), 9.
[58] Barandiaran, *Vasconia Antigua. Tras las huellas del hombre VII*, 276.

places. The only known structures from this period are dolmens, menhirs and cromlechs. These are megalithic monuments. Stones erected on the earth form a seat for the people and for the community. De Barandiaran supposes that these were funerary monuments that served as burial caves for the pastoral population and could hold several bodies.[59] In fact, skulls have been found, especially in dolmens, as well as valuable minerals and objects, from which it is hypothesized that these people died in the storeroom. Furthermore, the east/west orientation of the dolmen chamber as well as the offerings and amulets that accompanied the dead indicate an ancestor cult that was everywhere associated with religious ideas, beliefs and feelings.[60]

Among them, the menhirs are considered the clearest manifestation because they most closely resemble the nearby funerary monuments.[61] A menhir is a long, raw piece of stone stuck vertically into the ground. De Barandiaran admits the high probability that the menhirs precede the stele, and from this, the nature of such a stone is inferred. He documented the menhir in the meadow of Ata,[62] a stone set into the ground three meters high, massively resembling a nearby structure (see Fig.4, below). Further, Fernando de Mendoza, in his article in the *Boletín de la Comisión de Monumentos históricos y artísticos de Navarra* entitled 'Un cementerio antiguo en la Borunda,' equated the menhirs and the stelae, as if the former represented the precursor of the stelae that followed them. Barandiaran paraphrases the author's words:

> What should we think about the fate of the stones we are talking about? It must be stated categorically that they are grave stelae [...] Perhaps they are a memory, a faint memory of the menhir statues of other countries. Having lost the anthropomorphic signs that can be seen on them, they traditionally preserve the form of menhirs.[63]

[59] Ibid., 281.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Jose Miguel Barandiaran, *Estelas Discoidales del Pais Vasco* (I) (Bilbao: La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1981), 83.
[62] Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*, 141
[63] Ibid., 142.

Figure 4: Menhir in the meadow of Ata, two views

Places of burial: gardens and places of assembly
Burial places are chosen very carefully. Just as in the construction of houses, dolmens are never built on a meadow unsuitable for grazing cattle.[64] A dolmen station in the Pyrenees is usually located in a present or former sheepfold; dolmens are unlikely to be found far from a suitable site for a shepherd's settlement. Dolmens are located in summer pastures.[65] The appropriate place for the burial of the deceased was where the soil was fertile for grazing. There, where the life of the earth is rooted and grows internally, the spirits are rooted into the earth and they travel its inner corridors. In the body of the earth, the cycle of beginning and end is completed. This connection with life can be illustrated by the names of the burial places. They are called *baratza* in Basque, which means both garden and gathering place. Two are cromlech sites that bear the name *baratza*, one is the *Mairubaratza* and the other is the *Jentilbaratza*.

Like any building, the megalithic monuments are a work of art, a man-made work, just like the painted walls of Santimamiñe or the cave of Lascaux. Neither de Barandiaran nor current archaeological research has made an aesthetic judgment about the Paleolithic buildings. Archaeology considers tools and buildings as remains and material findings of a pre-written period. Jorge Oteiza assigns them an aesthetic meaning "because of their purpose, within which they signify the purest and highest creation that can be conceived and determined in an aesthetic language."[66]

The Void in the Middle of a Circle: Spiritual Interpretation of Cromlech
Cromlech, also called *arrespil* (pile of stones), is characterized by a pile of stones forming a circular structure. It could be said that they are fences composed of several menhirs.

[64] Barandiaran, *El hombre prehistórico y arte rupreste en Espana*, 24.
[65] Ibid., 10.
[66] Ibid., 33.

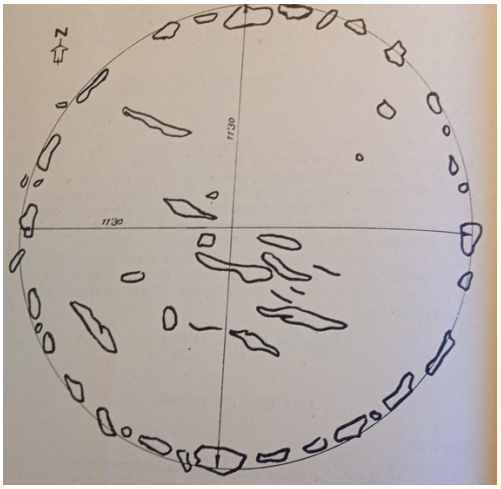

Figure 5: Reconstruction of the Unamene cromlech in Gipuzkoa; © Grupo de Ciencias Naturales 'Aranzadi' de la Real Sociedad Vascongada de los Amigos del País

It is a megalithic monument placed in a circle, from which a void is formed in the middle of the circle. Archaeologists do not pay attention to the empty space inherent in the circle, but to the material trace left by human creation. Jorge Oteiza, an artist and sculptor, has devoted himself to the aesthetic question of what structures created by Neolithic people tell us: what does this fence of stones stand for?

> The Basque cromlech is a small, internally empty cromlech, an aesthetic construction (empty statues) of spiritual protection with which the artistic process of our prehistory ends.[67]

Pure and emptiness fall on the Basque word *uts* (emptiness). In general, *uts* describes a state of perfection of purity and of completeness, which denotes emptiness. According to Oteiza, the cromlech is the epitome of this double meaning of purity and emptiness.[68] To this he adds an aesthetic interpretation: "The emptiness as an aesthetic sign and symbol means the completion, the end of an aesthetic development."[69] For Oteiza, the highlighting of this emptiness in an architectural monument means the highest expression of spiritual fullness, namely a connection with the body of the earth, reflection and "image of the empty firmament" (*Urtzi* = resonance of God),[70] which reaches perfection in the Neolithic Age with the plastic representation of emptiness. The man of the Neolithic procured a sense of world over creative acts, from artifacts over painting up to the architectural building.

According to the aesthetic theory presented in Oteiza's treatise *Ley de los cambios (*Law of Transformation), art is a language approaching reality which dissolves the distance created by other means. In this sense, emptiness signifies the culmination of a development of creation in creative action through successive negations, a progressive

[67] Jorge Oteiza, *Quosque Tandem…! (*Arre: Pamiela, 1995), 36.
[68] Ibid., 43.
[69] Ibid., 36.
[70] Ibid., 16

series of eliminations, or phenomenological reductions. "Art is entering a zone of silence (I have landed in a negative space, in a space that is alone and empty)."[71] In the void, all means of communication are reduced to pure receptivity, to spatial silence. The incommunicability of communication according to operative theories or the cessation of speaking about that mystical experience are considered analogous to this aesthetically determined spiritual experience of nothingness, this transcendental nothingness. Then art is no longer at the service of life. Life is there for itself, as art reveals in its nakedness:[72]

> An artistic language that aesthetically concludes with the definition of an empty sign, a transcendent nothing.[73]

The aesthetic nothingness is, for Jorge Oteiza, the culmination of a spiritual path that every human being follows through art. The Neolithic cromlech is an expression of the radical immanentism that ends in emptiness. "In the Basque tradition, nothingness is a religious and natural affirmation."[74] Oteiza distinguishes the Basque pre-Indo-European mentality or style from the metaphysically influenced Western mentality, where being is superior to non-being. According to Ortíz-Osés, the Basque conception of the world "approached Eastern mythologies and their conception of nothingness, emptiness, or non-being (nirvana)."[75] Thus, in Basque mythology, the negative is a kind of void that has its own entity and no longer has a relationship with affirmation or fullness. This gives rise to the relationship between the no (*ez*) and the void (*uts*), since negativity is considered a void formed by reality. The hermeneuticist Ortíz-Osés argues that the foundation of the world is based on the maternal symbol, "not, therefore, the full, but the void, the womb, the womb or navel of the mother goddess that represents the earth."[76]

Conclusion: Hidden Treasures

> It is believed that the dolmen on the summit of Doronsorogane on the mountain Arantzazumendi, on the border between Ataum and Idiazabal, contains an oxhide filled with gold, which is why it is known as *Urezko amurra* (Almoravids of the gold hole). It is said that in Plazentzia, between the summit of Irukutzeta and Elgoibar, there are twelve boxes full of gold, eleven of which are hidden in stone mounds. During two excursions to this mountain in 1920 and 1921, I found eleven stone mounds between the

[71] Ibid., 64.
[72] Jorge Oteiza, *Ley de los cambios* (Zarauz: Ediciones Tristán-Deche Arte Contemporáneo, 1990), 12.
[73] Oteiza, *Quosque Tandem…!*, 8.
[74] Ibid.,14
[75] Ortíz-Osés, *Los mitos vascos,* 47.
[76] Ibid.

places mentioned in the legend, which were later explored and recognized as dolmens.[77]

The location of the treasures hidden in the earth is proved in the megalithic monuments. In the body of the earth, on whose surface the circles of life and death close, the grass (life) grows and touches the body, which likewise the body of the earth accommodates. This space enclosed by the sacred circle of all those belonging to the body of the earth is a pure space. Abundance and luxuriance reign there, for it is the place of anamnesis, where nothing is forgotten or lost, but remembered with brilliant clarity. Attended and guarded by the Mistress of all genii, her epiphany is the pure power that shapes, forms and annihilates, sometimes as a ball of fire, sometimes as wind power. She reminds us that this shape giving power is the domain of those types of mothers, namely giving birth or bringing to light.

Figure 6: Leiza, in Aizkorri, Gipukzoa.

Oteiza's aesthetic interpretation confirms the thesis presented here with archaeological and ethnological material by José Miguel Barandiaran, that the cavity has a meaningful symbolic sense in the Basque mytho-hermeneutics of the earth. It is not filled up but remains animated by numen. Likewise, I adopt Osé's mytho-hermeneutic, according to which the figure of Mari deserves a hermeneutic attributed to a collective consciousness that is beyond occidental culture. However, I do not assign a matriarchalism towards her, nor do I attest Mari to the status of a goddess in Basque mythology. On the contrary, I propose to speak of matrixiality. This refers to a philosophical category whose semantics relates to the genus of all kinds of mothers and whose meaning goes to the embedding principle of each design (Saratxaga Arregi 2019).

[77] Jose Miguel de Barandiaran, *Eusko-Folklore*,146.

In this thesis, I have argued that the topology of the earth is characterized by a symbolic order, that it is inhabited by shaping forces whose mistress, Mari, epitomizes that self-regulating power of the earth. Hereby, the numen Mari is to be seen less as a goddess or mother, but as a shaping force that shapes the earth in its equilibrium. To this thesis is to be added to call the earth an embedding space, equal to a cavity.

Everyone who walks through the nodes of the corridor finds the coordinates of the place where the treasures are hidden. They are those where the beginning and the end coincide. In this impossibility for the eyes, the golden coat seems to be hidden. In this paradox for knowledge, reason (*logos*) and law (*nomos*) of the earth remain.

About the Author

Arantzazu Saratxaga Arregi, PhD, born 1982, is a university lecturer and philosopher. An epistemology of complex and self-organizing processes, such aa philosophy of endomilieus and environmental ties, informs her current research. Most important publication: *Matrixial Philosophy. Mother - World- Womb: Towards a Multivalent Ontology*.

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The Influence of Christian Religion on the Rite of Passage of Ikwe-ezi in Mgbidi of Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The rite of passage of Ikwe-ezi in Mgbidi was a ritual that was planned, managed, and executed by elders both male and female in the Mbgidi communities of Imo state, Nigeria; the procedure of the ceremony was clear-cut and well adhered-to by the people of the land. However, the introduction of Christianity to the different Mbgidi communities changed the narrative. The crux of this paper is to highlight the changes introduced to the Ikwe-ezi by Christian religious authorities, which, of course, grossly affected its narrative and simplified the steps of its proceedings. After careful investigation through a series of interviews with elders of the Mgbidi community, it was found that despite the alterations introduced by Christianity, there appears to be concurrence between the Traditionalists and the Christians as regards the Ikwe-ezi rites of passage. It was also found that after the alterations introduced by the Church, two versions of the Ikwe-ezi now exist: the first has the approval of Christians and Traditionalists who have resolved to identify themselves with the ritual. Hence, they participate by making their daughters undergo the Ikwe-ezi. The second version can be performed in absentia*: if the girl and her parents cannot visit the village either because they live in a*

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faraway city or overseas, the girl's parents will send money to their relatives in the village to purchase the items for the rituals and they will be conducted in their absence. However, even if the girl's parents do not want to be partakers of the rite, their relatives in the village may perform the Ikwe-ezi without their consent and that of their daughter.

Keywords: Ikwe-ezi, Christianity, puberty, rite of passage, Igbo

Résumé

Les rites de passage des jeunes filles des Ikwe-ezi en Mgbidi étaient autrefois planifiés, gérés, et exécutés par les ainés, masculins et féminins, des communautés Mbgidi dans l'état d'Imo, au Nigéria; les procedures de la cérémonie étaient précises et suivies par tous les gens du pays. Cependant l'introduction du Christianisme dans les diverses communautés du pays a apporté de profonds changements. Le but de cette communication est de mettre en évidence les conséquences de ces changements chez les Ikwe-ezi quand les autorités Chrétiennes entrèrent en conflit avec le rituel Mbgidi et imposèrent, entre autre, un changement de narratif et une simplification des procédures rituelles. Une recherche basée sur une série de conversation avec les ainés des communautés Mgbidi a révélée qu'en dépit des modifications introduites par le Christianisme, les traditionalistes et les Chrétiens développèrent une certaine convergence en regard du rituel Ikwe-ezi. Les deux versions du rituel qui émergèrent alors contribuent maintenant à la continuité de son existence: la première version a l'approbation des Chrétiens et de ceux qui, parmi les traditionalistes, ont résolu de continuer le rituel dans sa nouvelle forme, en faisant en sorte que leurs filles puissent participent au rituel. La seconde version, qui peut être conduite in absentia, *répond aux besoins des jeunes filles ou de leurs parents qui ne peuvent visiter leur village parce qu'ils vivent dans un ville éloignée ou outremer; les parents de la jeune fille envoient alors de l'argent aux membres de leurs familles restés dans le village pour qu'ils se procurent les objects et denrées nécessaire au rituel qui se tiendra alors même en l'absence de la jeune fille. Afin de maintenir la continuité de ce rituel essentiel pour le bien-être de la communauté, la parenté au village se chargera du rituel même si la jeune fille ou les parents de la jeune fille ne veulent pas participer à la tradition, et en l'absence de leur consentement.*

Mot-clés: Ikwe-ezi, Christianisme, puberté, rite de passage, Igbo

Introduction

Prior to the colonization of Africa by Europeans, Africans had their different modes of worshiping their gods and deities, and these gods (through priests/priestesses) dictated the ritual processes involved in each rite of passage, every community with their traditional peculiarities. The rite of passage of Ikwe-ezi in Mgbidi, Imo State, Nigeria, was performed each time a girl attained puberty and is still performed today, although changed. The ceremony was planned, managed and executed by selected elders of the Mgbidi land; it was an essential ritual held in high esteem by the different groups composing the Mgbidi community. This ceremony was structured according to the customs and tradition of the people of Mgbidi; for years they performed the Ikwe-ezi for the process of transiting adolescent girls from one social status, that of child, to the other, that of woman. The rituals involved were specific to the communities and all instructions were observed by all parties involved.

In an interview with Chief Nicholas Chukwudi Okereke the Ebubedike 1 of Mgbidi (2023), he disclosed that the practice started on the 10th of February 1786 with the daughter of a peasant. Moreover, Innocent Duru (2017), a reporter for *The Nation Online Newspaper*, writes that Chief Festus Orji Achonu, the Principal Palace Secretary to the traditional ruler, revealed in an interview that the practice started with the beautiful daughter of a peasant as a result of her beauty, because many people were jealous of her. The beautiful peasant girl eventually became pregnant out of wedlock; this provoked the elders to converge and declare the act (pregnancy out of wedlock) a taboo and they resolved that she should be banished from the town. Her helpless father cried but found no help; resigned to the fate of his daughter, he swore that nothing would ever put an end to Ikwe-ezi in the land. And that marked the beginning of the Ikwe-ezi rite of passage. Moreover, the gods gave their consent and that is why nobody has been able to stop the Ikwe-ezi Mgbidi rite of passage since then. Yet, though the practice has not ceased, it has been modified because of the introduction of Christianity into the Mgbidi community of Nigeria.

The introduction of Christianity to Mgbidi brought about strong opposition to the Ikwe-ezi rite of passage, as Christian authorities frowned at the fact that the girls were required to parade nude at the market place. Specifically, their nudity was required so that the old and wise women of the land could make an assessment of the girls to ascertain whether or not any of the girls was pregnant. Any girl found to be pregnant would be forever banished. Christianity kicked against this rite because some girls may have been sexually abused during its performance. This led to violent fracas and many lives were lost. However, in order for peace to reign, and to aid the preservation of the Ikwe-ezi rite of passage, the Traditionalists capitulated to some of the demands of the Christians. Among other elements, the Christians and the Traditionalists compromised on the nudity:

wrappers would be made to cover the girls' waists, but their breasts must be exposed. This negotiation was instrumental to the sustainability and preservation of this ceremony from one generation to the other from precolonial times until today.

In the course of this research, prominent indigenous members of the Mgbidi community were interviewed by the researcher; moreover, newspaper publications were consulted and data sourced through personal interviews. Finally this paper includes a corpus of mosaic paintings by artist Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi, a member of the Mgbidi community, as well as by the author. These images seek to narrate the step-by-step procedure of the Ikwe-ezi Mgbidi and at the same time to provide visual documentation. Both the paper and the paintings are intended to serve as a tool to preserve the Ikwe-ezi ritual and hence further aid its easy transition from generation to generation.

A rite of passage, in respect to this study and as defined by Norbeck, 2021, is understood to be a set of distinctive rituals peculiar to a people within a geographical space involving the transition of an age group from one social status to another. He adds that several of the most significant and common rites of passage are linked with the biological crises, or milestones, of life - birth, maturity, reproduction, and death - that bring changes in social status and, thus, in the social relations of the people concerned. Other rites of passage celebrate changes that are wholly cultural, such as initiation into societies composed of people with special interests, such as, for example, fraternities.

Rites of passage similar to the Ikwe-ezi that involve progressing pubertal girls into adulthood are performed in other parts of Nigeria and throughout Africa, such as the Dipo rite of the Krobo people of the Eastern Region in Ghana. Anorkor, Christopher and Belgrave (2021) write that the aim of the Dipo is to assist pubertal girls to move into adulthood by shaping moral values and social responsibilities, preventing unsafe sexual behavior, and learning home management skills. However, unlike the Ikwe-ezi rite, which is performed each time a girl sees her first menstrual flow, Anorkor, Christopher, and Belgrave go on to state that the Dipo ritual takes place every year in April. The training portion of the ritual is designed to last for several weeks and each day represents an important step towards adulthood. The last stage involves the girls being purified on the bank of the sacred river, stripped naked and washed, their hair cut and finally prepared to wear the beautiful and colourful glass beads that are typical of the region, an important symbol of femininity, beauty and wealth for the Krobo woman.

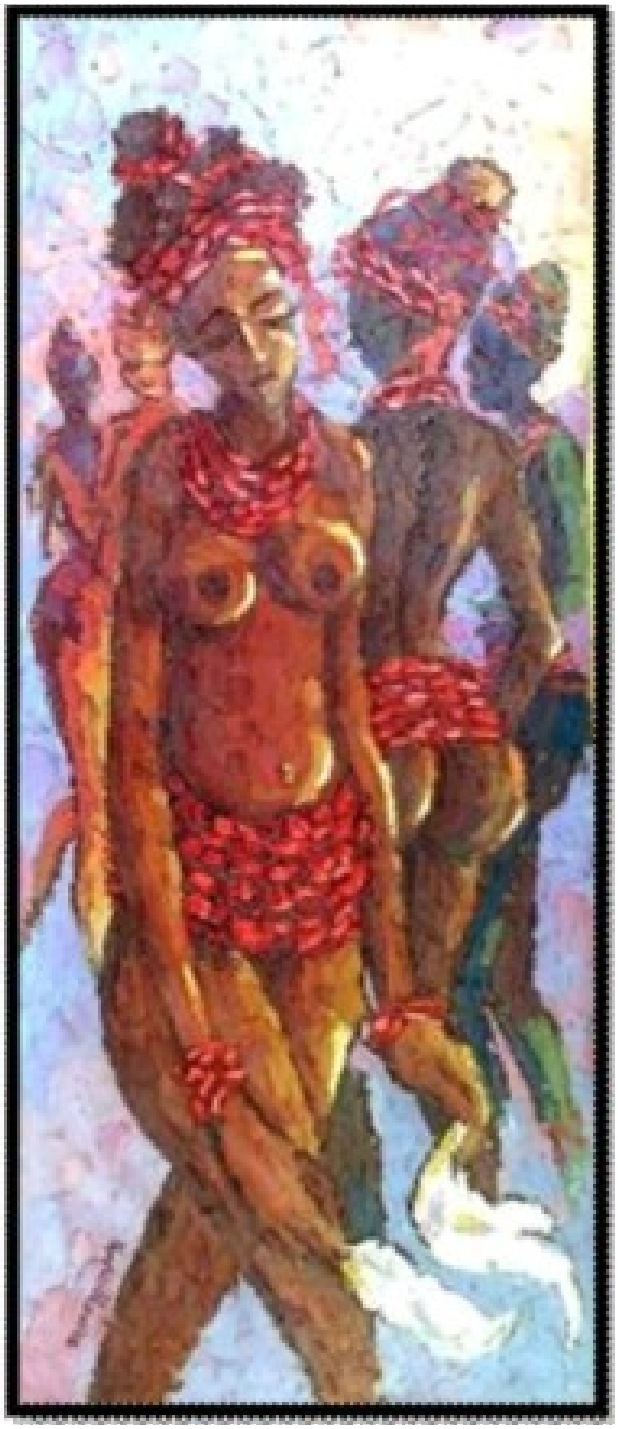

Plate 1: *Virgin Dance* depicts virgin girls undergoing a rite of passage. The painting is an attempt to portray how most rites of passage in Africa that have to do with social status would require that the participants strip nude in the process of performing certain parts - which, of course, was frowned at by Christianity.

Title: *Virgin Dance*
Artist: Etim Ekpenyong
Medium: Etimpaste (an alternative water-soluble painting medium)
Year: 2010

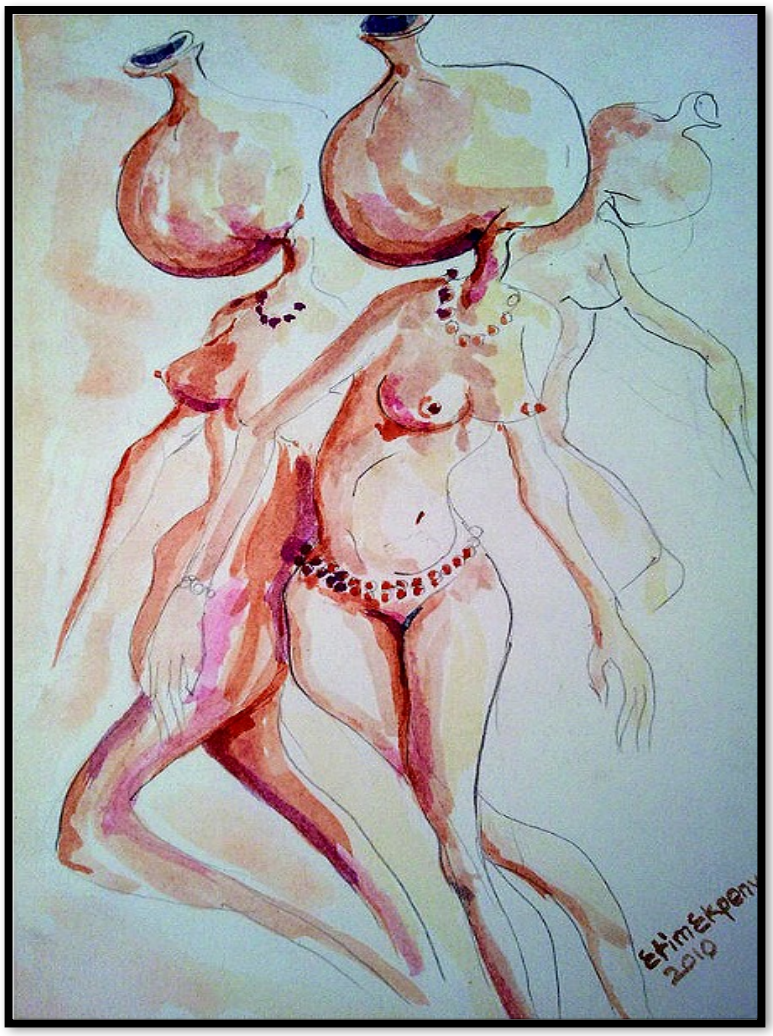

Plate 2: *Virgins of Our Land* is a surrealistic rendition of the Ikwe-Ezi rite of passage. The calabash that represents the heads of the girls symbolizes vessels of virtue: because these girls have been able to preserve their virginity, and by so doing honour their family and community, they are highly regarded by the whole community. Moreover, like the painting in Plate 1, this piece also seeks to portray that point of the rite of passage where nudity is demanded from the individual who is being transited from one social status to the other - an aspect that Christianity objects to.

Title: *Virgins of Our Land*
Artist: Etim Ekpenyong
Medium: Etimpaste (an alternative water-soluble painting medium)
Year: 2010

Thus, in order to prevent the extinction of such rite of passage, both parties (the Traditionalists and the agents of the new religion) came to a compromise by restructuring the ceremony to suit both parties. Hence the ritual was preserved for generations to come.

The Rites Of Passage of Ikwe-ezi in Mgbidi before Its Alteration by Christianity

According to oral tradition in Mgbidi and corroborated by artist Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi, the precolonial Ikwe-ezi rite of passage began when a girl saw her first menstrual flow. She was required to inform her parents, after which her parents were mandated to notify the entire community with one or two gunshots. Then she was sent to the stream to fetch water with which to bathe in preparation for Ikwe-ezi, after which the *fatten room* process would commence. A booth with a thatched roof was built for her in her father's compound in which she underwent the fattening ritual. The young girl invited her friends to gather long stones of local chalk with which they prepared *uhie*, a lotion made from the red rock that the girl applied to her skin every day until the end of the fatten room retreat, which should have lasted for two weeks. During her retreat, she did not perform any house chores; rather, she remained in her hut grinding *uhie* for immediate use. Throughout this period, special delicacies and delicious meals were prepared by her mother for her to eat to enhance her health and beauty because, after the Ikwe-ezi, it was hoped that diligent and responsible suitors would woo her.

Immediately after the fatten room period, Chief Achonu explains that every girl who performed the traditional ritual was required to walk round the market with both breasts bare, so that people (especially the elderly women) would be able to ascertain whether or not she was pregnant. If she was pregnant before entering the fattening room, on the day she went to the market with her breasts visible, she would be forever banished from the community (Duru).

According to Ikobi (2023), the next phase of the Ikwe-ezi was that the maiden would go to a river called Mmiri Nwataoma ('water of a beautiful child') with a small yam which was thrown into the river as a gift to the goddess Obana. When she did this, it meant she had completed the Ikwe-ezi ceremony, and that she was now pure.

Plate 3: Mmiri Nwataoma, the river where the girl performing the Ikwe-ezi is expected to go at the end of the ritual with a small yam. This yam will be thrown into the river as a gift to the goddess Obana.

Photographer: Comrade Madu Ogochukwu Gabriel
Year: 2022

After this had been done, two nights of celebration were held, where the girl distributed large quantities of coconut and fish to all who had come to celebrate with her. The yam, coconuts, and fish that the girl gave to her well-wishers were gift items - symbols of gratitude. This gift-giving part of the ceremony was performed on two different nights; the first on the Orie market day called *Ikpobaaliudu ego*. Chief Achonu states further that the second ceremony was done on Eke market day, and it was called *Ibuoyo*. On these two days, the girl was required to give out a coconut and a fish to her guests who came to congratulate her (Duru). The guests may have reciprocated her good gesture by giving her money. During these two days, the celebrant would dance to traditional folk music, often to the delight of her guests, and she was likely to be showered with gifts.

Ikwe-ezi Mgbidi and the Alterations by Christianity

Christianity was a new religion first brought to the Igbo nation by European missionaries Rev. Schon and his associates at the shores of the River Niger, and soon followed by many others. Chukwuma O. Okeke, Christopher N. Ibenwa, and Gloria Tochukwu Okeke, in their 2017 article 'Conflicts between African Traditional Religion and Christianity in Eastern Nigeria: The Igbo Example,' state that when Christianity arrived in Igbo land in 1857 the

traditional religion of the Igbo people had a serious contender. According to the authors, initially the challenges which Christianity posed to the traditional religion were not regarded as grave by the people because conversion to Christianity at the early stage was not an easy task.

Christian missionaries and authorities found several aspects of the Ikwe-ezi ritual objectionable. As Christianity spread and gathered momentum in Mgbidi, the church saw a need either to abolish or to modify the Ikwe-ezi rites of passage to suit Christian doctrines. First they objected to the fact that the girls were required to perform part of this ritual nude, then they could not accept the girls' dealings with Obana, goddess of the river, particularly that they had to go to the stream, dip their feet into the water, and then visit the shrine of the goddess. Christians sought to eradicate the ritual and initially the Traditionalists resisted. Sadly, this resulted in the outbreak of violence and many lives were lost. Eventually, for the sake of peace, and in order to preserve and transmit for future generations the Ikwe-ezi rite of passage, the Traditionalists accepted the reformation of the ritual.

The new form of the rite of passage still begins when a maiden sees her first menstrual blood, which is followed with one or two gunshots; the next stage (though optional) is the fatten room period. Going to the stream to fetch water to bathe is also optional. Moreover, the modified Ikwe-ezi omits both the baring of both breasts during a public visit to the market and the girl's visit to the shrine of the water goddess, considered to be too pagan. However, the new ritual allows the girl to bare one of her breasts in public while concealing the other during the visit to the market. The exchange of gifts, especially food, was retained and the feasting was extended into the Christian church. Punishments for pregnancy during the Ikwe-ezi ritual persist.

Currently, any girl found to be with child while performing the Ikwe-ezi will be forever banished from the community, never to set foot in it again. Although she is allowed to travel through the land in a vehicle, she must not set her feet on the soil; if she attempts this, she will be lynched and the family will pay dearly for it (Duru). If the girl were to die, her body would not be buried in her homeland because she has defiled herself through fornication and pregnancy; her corpse automatically becomes unclean, and burying her in her homeland becomes a taboo. Chief Evaristus Igbeleje (AchKuchiyerewata) (2023) stressed that if a banished girl sneaks in and out of the community unnoticed, her parents will pay dearly for it because the gods of the land that sees all will find them out and mete appropriate punishment on them; they will continue to suffer the wrath of the gods until they appease the gods for consenting to their daughter's visit, for it defiles the land and may have adverse effect on the soil and harvest.

According to Chief Marcel Ogbeleje, the Chairman of Umuokpara Mgbidi Village association, Lagos State chapter:

> Ikwe-ezi is a part of our culture and tradition. Therefore, any girl who is of age and did not undergo this ceremony will not be regarded as a native of Mgbidi. It is called 'Fatten room'. It is done when a young girl sees her first menstrual period. The influence of Christian religious on it is that some certain aspects of the tradition has been amended, such as nudity and going of Obana shrine and drop a small yam and going to the stream dip their legs into the water, after which they are required to collect some water with a small clay pots. All these have been stopped due to the opposition by Christians. (Ogbeleje, M. 2021)

Ogbeleje reveals that also motivating the Traditionalists to accept these reforms was that, while these girls went about the community nude, they made themselves vulnerable to sexual assault by unscrupulous men. He further explains that after the first celebration, the next and the final one comes after four days. It is the bigger ceremony. Food, assorted drinks, and music will be made available as family and friends join in celebrating and rejoicing that the girl has successfully transited from one social status to the other. She is now free to marry if she so wishes. Moreover, even if she eventually gets pregnant while still in her father's house, it will not be considered a problem unlike if she got pregnant without first undertaking the Ikwe-ezi rite of passage. Suffice to say that the corpse of a banished girl will not be buried in her hometown.

> The advantage of the Ikwe-Ezi, it is that our young girls are preserved until after the fatten room ritual because they acknowledge the implications of getting pregnant before the Ikwe-ezi, and the parents are also very careful to educate their daughters about the implications of them mingling with male friends before the rite of passage. Because of all the modifications by Christianity, this ceremony is preserved from generation to generation due to the consensus. Therefore, both Christians and the Traditionalists are required to make their daughters who are of age partake in the Ikwe-ezi or else such will be completely ex-communicated from the entire town. (Ogbeleje, 2021)

> Due to the fusion of Christian beliefs, the rite is rounded-up with a thanksgiving ceremony at the church. Moreover, at present times, even Traditionalists do not parade their daughters at the market. But they still make their daughters expose one of their breasts while the other is covered with an African print. (Ikobi, 2021)

Presently, both parties (the Traditionalists and the Christians) seem to be satisfied with the way the Ikwe-ezi is carried out. Igbeleje (2023) expounds that the very essence of the Ikwe-ezi is to guard pubertal girls against promiscuity, so in as much as the parents of a girl who has seen her first menstrual flow have agreed to have their daughter perform the Ikwe-ezi (despite the alterations by Christianity), all are satisfied. Igbeleje (2023) further explains that the Traditionalists will only frown at those parents who refuse to allow their daughter to perform the Ikwe-ezi, or do so when their daughter is no longer a teenager. This censure is because, according to custom, the Ikwe-ezi is meant to be performed when the girl is between the ages of thirteen and fourteen years of age, as soon as she sees her first menstrual period.

After the alteration of the Ikwe-ezi ritual by Christianity, there now exists two versions of it, as explained by Chief Evaristus Igbeleje (2023): the first version is performed by Traditionalists and Christians who choose to identify themselves with the reformed Ikwe-ezi and make their daughters undergo the rite. The second version is performed on behalf of absent Mgbidi people by their relatives in the village with or without their consent; this version allows the reformed Ikwe-ezi to be performed *in absentia*.

Ikwe-Ezi *in Absentia*

Ikobi (2023) explains that some Christians of Mgbidi who wish to identify with the Ikwe-ezi, but due to distance between their city or country of residence and Mgbidi are not able to appear with their daughter, can request for the ritual to be held even though the girl is absent. Such Christians will give their consent to relatives in the village who wish to carry out the Ikwe-ezi on their behalf; they do this by sending money to these relatives for purchase of the ritual items. Then, the rite will be done by their relatives in Mgbidi on their behalf *in absentia*.

Furthermore, although diehard Christians may vow never to participate in the Ikwe-ezi ritual, Ikobi (2023) discovered that some of their close relatives in Mgbidi – grandmothers or aunts of pubertal daughters – have resolved to perform the rite on their behalf even without their consent since, according to tradition, it is a taboo for a girl that has reached puberty not to undergo the Ikwe-ezi. “The Ikwe-ezi can now be performed *in absentia* with or without the consent of the parents of the girl.”

To perform the rite *in absentia*, Ikobi states that, even though the girl does not appear in the village to undergo the Ikwe-ezi (and that, therefore, the elderly women will not be able to ascertain whether or not she is pregnant), there are alternative methods available for the ritual’s success. Primary among these is an announcement by the girl’s relative to the entire community that their granddaughter or niece in the city or in diaspora has

reached puberty, calling out their name, the native gun is SHOT (a fundamental aspect of the ritual), the girl is not pregnant, and has been abstaining from sexual relationships with the opposite sex. The family member will then proceed to buy all the ritual items such as yam, coconut, and fish which she will give out as gifts to well-wishers; all this may be done without the knowledge of the girl and her parents.

The present versions of the Ikwe-ezi are essentially meant to continue the public intervention of Mgbidi elders and the exercising of their rights in the demonstration of a girl's attainment of womanhood, as well as anchoring the cultural identity and heritage of the Mgbidi community.

A Set of Mosaic Paintings by Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi: A Visual Narrative of a Step-by-step Process of the Ikwe-ezi Mgbidi Rite of Passage

The following body of mosaic paintings by Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi is a visual documentation of the Ikwe-ezi in Mgbidi. In this section of the article, brief descriptions of the mosaic paintings are done based on medium, theme, colour and style. The mosaic paintings will further preserve and document in visual form the ritual, and aid its smooth transmission from one generation to another.

Plate 4: *Maidenhead* is a mosaic painting produced in 2018. The painting is composed of a stylized female genital with a drop of blood depicting the first menstrual flow of a girl; and the predominant colour is purple.

Title: *Maidenhead*
Medium: Mosaic on tarpaulin
Dimensions: 98 x 77 cm
Artist: Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi

Plate 5: *EgbeEzi* is a mosaic painting produced in 2018. The form is created in the representational domain; it is a spark of light from a gunshot that heralds the commencement of Ikwe-ezi. Depicting a fundamental part of the Ikwe-ezi Mgbidi of Imo state. The predominant colours are deep blue used to depict the sky, and the yellow spark from the gun shot.

Title: *EgbeEzi*
Medium: Mosaic on velvet
Dimensions: 66 x 61 cm
Artist: Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi

Plate 6: *Adaora* is a mosaic produced in 2018 on Masonite board. The form is created in the realistic domain depicting the joy and pride exhibited by virgin girls who partake in the Ikwe-ezi Mgbidi of Imo state. The painting is composed of a single figure of a maiden robed in a loin cloth wrapped round her chest with a string of red coral beads adorns her head: one of the traditional attires designed for the rite of passage of the maidens of Ikwe-ezi in Mgbidi Imo state. The colour scheme is predominantly blue.

Title: *Adaora*
Medium: Mosaic on Masonite board
Dimensions: 61cm x 92 cm
Artist: Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi

Plate 7: *At the Stream* is a mosaic painting produced in 2018. It is composed of two feminine hands whose wrists are adorned with coral beads; the hands bear a clay pot and fetch water from the stream. The mosaic painting depicts the part of the rite where the girls are required to go the stream and fetch water with a clay pot.

Title: *At the Stream*
Medium: Mosaic on canvas
Dimensions: 61 x 61 cm
Artist: Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi

Plate 8: *NmiriNwataoma* is a mosaic painting produced in 2018 on Masonite board, depicting the period before the fatten room, as the maidens return from the stream where they went to fetch water as part of the rite. The painting is composed of a stylized female figure bearing a well decorated clay pot of water on her head. And the colour scheme of the painting is brown.

Title: *NmiriNwataoma*
Medium: Mosaic on Masonite board
Dimensions: 61 x 61 cm
Artist: Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi

Plate 9: *The Bath* is a mosaic painting produced in 2018. The painting is composed of a single nude female figure bathing in preparation for the Ikwe-ezi; her hair is elaborately made. “The Bath” depicts the period before the maidens commence the fatten room ritual.

Title: *The Bath*
Medium: Mosaic on canvas
Dimensions: 61 x 61 cm
Artist: Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi

Plate 10: *After the Bath* is a mosaic painting produced in 2018. The painting is composed of a single female figure dressed in a white wrapper tied round her chest and another piece of white cloth wrapped round her head. The colour scheme is chiefly yellow and white.

Title: *After the Bath*
Medium: Mosaic on canvas
Dimensions: 76 x 76 cm
Artist: Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi

Plate 11: *Nneka* is a Mosaic painting produced in 2018 on Masonite board; the colour scheme is predominantly brown. The painting is composed of a maiden robed in a loincloth with her left breast exposed; moreover, she bears on her right shoulder a neatly folded wrapper that conceals her right breast; a string of coral beads adorns her neck.

Title: *Nneka*
Dimensions: 61 x 92 cm
Medium: Mosaic on Masonite board
Artist: Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi

Plate 12: *The Report* is a mosaic painting produced in 2018 on Masonite board. It is composed of four female figures dressed in blouses, wrappers and head scarves, and they are in deep conversation with each other. The crux of their discussion is whether or not a particular maiden is pregnant after being assessed by their eagle eyes.

Title: *The Report*
Medium: Mosaic on Masonite board
Dimensions: 91 x 61 cm
Artist: Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi

Plate 13: *Hospitality* is a Mosaic painting produced in 2018 on straw board. It is composed of a single female figure dressed in a single wrapper wrapped round her chest, her hair is elaborately made, her neck is adorned with coral beads, and she bears in her hand a calabash containing gifts of coconut and smoked fish for her guests. The colour scheme is predominantly blue.

Title: *Hospitality*
Medium: Mosaic on straw board
Dimensions: 76 x 64 cm
Artist: Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi

Plate 14: *Ji* is a mosaic painting produced in 2018 on Perspex. *Ji* means 'yam.' The mosaic shows a material element of the rite of passage ceremony of Ikwe-ezi of Mgbidi of Imo state. The image is composed of two yam tubers, one of which is half cut to reveal the white inner part of it, showing that it is of good quality. Yams are also something the girl may offer her guest in appreciation for honouring her invitation to celebrate her successful rite-of-passage. The colour scheme is blue and yellow.

Title: *Ji*
Medium: Mosaic on Perspex
Dimensions: 75 x 43 cm
Artist: Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi

Plate 15: *The Gifts* is a mosaic painting produced in 2018 on canvas. The colour scheme is purple, and it is composed of three coconut fruits and two fish in a bowl. Coconut and smoked fish both plays a vital role in Ikwe-ezi Mgbidi because, after the girl performs the rite, she is required to share coconut and smoked fish in appreciation to the monetary gifts she may receive from her visitors.

Title: *The Gifts*
Medium: Mosaic on canvas
Dimensions: 76 x 76 cm
Artist: Michael Chukuwemeka Ikobi

Conclusion

The Ikwe-ezi Mbgidi rite-of-passage has been in existence a very long time. It remains a well-established ceremony because both the young and old amongst Traditionalists and Christians within the Mgbidi communities have given their consent to its performance. Therefore, it was successfully preserved and has been transmitted from one generation to the other, from precolonial times until today.

For any custom or tradition to be successfully transmitted from generation to generation, it must enjoy the consent of everyone within the given community irrespective of their religious backgrounds, or else such a rite or festival will gradually fizzle out. Religion is a powerful and jealous force, and each religion demands from its members total adherence to its doctrines. Christianity forbids its members from exposing their private parts in public for any reason, nor does it permit its members to visit the shrines of idols. Therefore, for the Ikwe-ezi Mgbidi rites of passage to survive unto the next generations in Imo state, the Traditionalists had to yield to Christian reforms. In this process, the ritual lost its links with the river goddess, but salvaged its implicit connection with the fertility of the land. We know that this connection remains because when asked if the disappearance of the Ikwe-ezi rite-of-passage would have consequences for the whole community, Igbeleje (2023) points out that there would be dire consequences indeed since the gods gave their consent to ritual and, presumably, failure to enact it would lead to their displeasure.

However, thanks to a compromise between the Traditionalists and the Christians, Igbeleje said the issue of the Ikwe-ezi disappearing is not likely even though some diehard Christians have vowed never to be partakers of the rite. In a type of backlash to the doggedness of these Christians, some of their relatives residing in Mgbidi have resolved to perform Ikwe-ezi in the village on their behalf even without their consent. In a different situation, some Christian indigenes of Mbgidi who are in the diaspora, as well as those residing in cities far from Mbgidi who chose to identify with the Ikwe-ezi, authorize their relatives to carry out the Ikwe-ezi on their behalf by sending money to them. Both these types of ritual – those conducted without the consent of the parents and those who are conducted on behalf of people who cannot physically appear in the village - will be performed by their relatives in Mgbidi on their behalf *in absentia*.

The Ikwe-ezi Mgbidi is exclusive to the communities within Mgbidi; neighbouring communities such as Ibi-Asoegbe, Aji, Amiri, Otulu, Ozara and Oguta are not partakers of the Ikwe-ezi. These different communities may have their own rites of passage exclusively designed for transiting their pubertal girls into adulthood. The Ikwe-ezi came into existence centuries ago, precisely on 10 February 1768, and has undergone dramatic

adjustments - not without resistance from the Traditionalists of the community. However, in spite of this, Mgbidi elders have managed to maintain the ritual as a functioning institution to date, and they are pleased with present state of the Ikwe-ezi because as regards the alteration, they were among the agents of change rather than the passive recipients of Christian-inspired dogma. It is therefore recommended that the Ikwe-ezi Mgbidi should be well documented in book form and preserved. Moreover, a museum should be established where paintings, sculptural pieces, photographs and paraphernalia associated with the Ikwe-ezi be housed for future generations and for research purposes.

About the Author

Etim Ekpenyong Mfon teaches painting, drawing and art history in the Department of Fine Art, Yaba College of Technology, Nigeria. A member of the Art Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA) and Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA), Etim has published in several international and local journals.

About the Mosaic Artist

Michael Ikobi, PhD, was born on 28 May 1972. A Nigerian Contemporary Artist, Ikobi is a painter, stained glass producer, mosaicist and creative researcher. He is a practice-based artist in Lagos, Nigeria. He has exhibited widely in Nigeria and abroad. He is a member of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA).

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Mosuo Love: An Eight-Poem Collection

BANAMU 芭纳木

Translated and Compiled by Tami Blumenfield, PhD

Artist's Statement

I was born in a Mosuo matrilineal family. Our extended family household takes the mother's blood relations as the main line, connecting all the consanguineous people closely together. Our families are harmonious, peaceful, and beautiful. People trust and depend on each other. We are full of strong love here; the elderly and children, as well as the sick and disabled, are cared for and taken care of to the greatest extent by their families. Our marriage culture, reasonable and free, men and women together because of love and love, no economic relations, no interference by anyone, is the freest and best relationship. I will use my works to show and admire these excellent cultures and stories of Mosuo, which are natural expressions of my relatives and neighbors, as well as their lives and my own experiences.

My work here includes paintings and drawings in various styles, photographs, and an eight-poem collection called Mosuo Love. *After reaching age 35, I experienced a lot, and I thought deeply about life. I wanted to find a way to express myself, and I began to need a shorter, more direct, more emotionally expressive Chinese literary form for my writing. Thus I began learning how to*

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write poetry. The eight love poems presented here portray my emotional experiences at different stages in love. They record different phases of my life and different phases of my feelings.

Keywords: Mosuo poetry, Mosuo art, love poems, *zouhun*, Lugu Lake

艺术家自述

我是出生母系大家庭的摩梭人，今年 48 岁，毕业于云南艺术学院，美术专业。现在我创作诗歌、散文、电影剧本，拍摄纪录片素材。在我 35 岁以后，经历了很多事情，对人生有了很多思考，也有了表达的需求，我开始需要一种更简短、更直接、更便于抒发情感的汉语文学体裁来写作，于是我开始学习写诗歌。

现在，我已经诗歌写作十二年了，写的爱情诗比较多，这些爱情诗记录了我不同的人生阶段和不同的情感历程。这里的八首爱情诗，就是我不同阶段的感情经历的写照。

我写诗歌，从最初的简单直接的表达，到现在有意识的融入很多民族特色的思想和意识，是一个比较重要的提升，我从汉文化里转了一圈回来，才发现我们摩梭文化里，有很多先进的很人性化的东西，可以很好的处理生活中遇到的难题，很值得学习和传播，我很愿意把这些东西通过诗歌，包括其他的文学艺术作品展现出来，给人类带来美好的感受！

关键词: 摩梭诗歌、摩梭艺术、爱情诗歌、走婚、泸沽湖

Déclaration de l'artiste

Je suis née dans une famille matrilinéaire mosuo. La maisonnée de notre famille étendue est construite à partir de la lignées maternelle, des liens consanguins avec la mère qui nous connectent dans le même lignage. Nos familles sont harmonieuses, paisible, et belles. Les gens se font confiance et dépendent les uns des autres. Nos communautés sont construites sur des relations d'amour et d'entraide fortes: Nous nous soucions des personnes âgées et des enfants, ainsi que des malades et des handicapés, et nos familles s'occupent d'eux dans la plus grande mesure. Nos coutumes entourant le mariage sont rationnelles et respectent la liberté de chacun, elles permettent aux hommes et aux femmes de se rejoindre à cause de leur affection réciproque, sans contraintes économiques ou interférence de quiconque dans leurs relations. J'utilise mon travail artistique pour montrer l'excellence de ma culture, et pour présenter des histoires qui sont l'expression naturelle des ma

communauté, de ma parenté et de mes voisins, leurs vies et ma propre expérience.

Mon œuvre inclut des peintures et des dessins dans des styles et media variés, ainsi qu'une série de huit poèmes sur le thème de l'amour. Lorsque j'eu atteint l'âge de 35 et vécu de nombreuses expériences, j'ai réfléchie à la vie. Je voulais trouver une façon de m'exprimer et j'ai eu besoin d'une forme littéraire chinoise plus courte, plus directe, et plus expressive de mes sentiments, et j'ai commencé à apprendre la poésie. Les huit poèmes d'amour présentés ici reflètent mes expériences et les émotions de l'amour a divers stades. Ils enregistrent différentes phases de ma vie, et diverses nuance de mes sentiments.

Mots-clés : poésie Mosuo, art Mosuo, chants d'amour, *zouhun*, Lac Lugu

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Translator's Introduction

Banamu and I traveled through Italy together in May 2019, just before Covid, hosted by feminist organizations in Rome, Levico, and Firenze. As a former high school art teacher who had studied art in college, she knew much more about the incredible artistic production that surrounded us than I did and was an impassioned interpreter for the rest of us – when we could keep up with her, that is. Although for many years, Banamu and I had moved through the same spaces in her home region – particularly her home village in Yongning Township and the city of Lijiang, both in Yunnan Province – it was only through preparing for that whirlwind trip that we interacted for the first time. The following November, back in China, I finally met with her in her home village, but only for a few moments, as she was in the midst of helping a neighboring household prepare for a funeral. This multi-day event involved preparing copious amounts of food for the dozens of people who would attend. We sat together in the courtyard of that family's home, lingering after the others followed the firecrackers and chanting out the door and across the lane. We cannot have said very much, but did not really need to; the shared experience had created an intense mutual understanding. Banamu was writing madly, we both wanted to write about our time in Italy, and we dreamed up all kinds of projects.

This artistic offering is not about that trip, and this is not one of those projects that we dreamed up together, but I nonetheless feel it sprang forth from our time gazing at splendid, yet deeply patriarchal, Roman, Etruscan, and Italian art. How can one interpret these lines of poetry against that backdrop? What must it be like to have one's group reduced to a caricature, and need to create artistic expression that moves past, beyond

and through the caricatures? And perhaps most importantly, how can we reconcile instinctual passion with metaphorical expressions of longing, desire and impossibility?

All I know is that every time I approach these poems, I find my breath catching a little. Explore them below, in English or Chinese (in the Appendix), and see for yourself. Then continue on for a deeper understanding.

Author's Introduction to the Poetry Collection

In China, children begin primary school at the age of seven. When I was seven years old, I began to study in primary school. Like other minority children, I only started to encounter Chinese at that age. Before that, we only spoke our mother tongue, *Narua* [trans. note: original Mosuo language: *Mosuo hua*]. Upon entering school, we began learning to speak Chinese [*Han yu*], and at the same time, started learning Chinese characters.

As I recall, it was only after fourth grade that I could use Chinese with reasonable accuracy. Before then, I felt like I was always hesitating in between the two languages, between my mother tongue and *Han yu*, which took a lot of effort. Because you have to memorize and remember a lot of Chinese characters and vocabulary, and also switch around the mother tongue grammar. That grammar is quite different from *Han yu* grammar.

By the time I reached junior middle school, I could already use *Han yu* very well, especially for writing and composition. My essays were often taken as examples for my entire class and read aloud. Later on, every time I took an entrance examination for the next level of schooling, I gained many extra points because of my Chinese capabilities. I often used *Han yu* to record things in my daily life and to express feelings. For example, when I was young I wrote my diary in Chinese, and I used Chinese to write letters to my friends and to the boys that I liked.

Although I also use my mother tongue to communicate with my family members and other people from my *minzu*, using my mother tongue to compose my writing would not be possible. Because my mother tongue has no written form [*wen.zi*, lit. script or characters], I am even more dependent on *Han yu*.

After reaching age 35, I experienced a lot, and I thought deeply about life [人生]. I wanted to find a way to express myself, and I began to need a shorter, more direct, more emotionally expressive Chinese literary form for my writing. Thus I began learning how to write poetry.

I have been writing poetry for twelve years now. Much of my poetry is love poems. These poems record different phases of my life and different phases of my feelings. The eight love poems presented here portray my emotional experiences at different stages in love.

Mosuo Love: An Eight-Poem Collection

I
Water Demon

You say
I am water demon
Water demon of Lugu Lake
Long, long hair like the watery reeds
Entangling you
Twelve months a year
Tugging you along by your heart, running
You ask when you can
Return to my side
And let you love me

Clouds are floating on the mountain peak
The moon will always be full for five days
When my smile is still next to my lips
Quickly come to my side
When the little stream and the little stream meet one another
When the tree branch and tree branch wrap around one another
We will be together forever and never part
Until the waters of Lugu Lake turn into ice
Until the snows of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain melt into water

II
Teapot and Flame

Beloved *Ge-Ge*
You are the teapot in the fireplace
I am that leaf of fiercely blazing flame
You and I nestle together and caress

Beloved *Ge-Ge*
You are the tea resting by Apu*
I am the salt resting by Ah-Zhee*
Let us meet in the teapot
I will lick at you until you boil
You will melt me in your embrace

Beloved *Ge-Ge*
You ignite me until I am spent, turning into ash
I roast you until you crack, becoming a fragment
The spade of Apu
Pile me at the root of the *qing ce guo* tree*
The dustpan of Ah-Zhee
Throw you at the foot of the *qing ce guo* tree
At the end of life
We are still together

Author's Note: *Apu* is the Mosuo language term for grandfather. *Ah-Zhee* is the Mosuo language term for grandmother.

Translator's Notes: 1. The first line of each stanza is 亲亲的哥哥, qin qin de ge ge. *In Mandarin*, Ge-Ge *means Older Brother. It also can be used erotically, to address one's older male lover. 2. The* qing ci guo (青刺果) *tree is also known as* Prinsepia utilis, *sometimes translated as 'greenthorn tree.' This thorny tree is found throughout Yongning and much prized for its fragrant oil.*

III
The Two of Us

You and I are made for each other
You are honest while I am frank
I am aesthetic while you are pure
Our lucky number is 7
Jeeps are what we love the most
The day I was birthed
Abadosse dozed off
Making me arrive a little late
You and I could not pair up
No matter
Just let the god regret it
The two of us are fine
As close confidants in this lifetime
You give me courage
I give you wisdom
Cold and warmth, we feel together
Sour and sweet, we comfort one another

Author's Note: Abadosse is an important god in Mosuo legends who loves to do wacky and dramatic things.

IV
Nomadic Love

Please call me the descendant of the nomadic peoples
Summer in Lijiang
Winter, transferring to Dali
Year by year
Year by year
Years and months, so beautiful

Love the melting snow streaming down
Adorning the complexion
And then embellishing your heart
Love the wind of Erhai
Combing the long hair
Rubbing my earlobe, for you

Let us go
Go to Dali
Broad bosom of Erhai
Resembling so much my hemp-weaving grandmother
She can contain our little sorrows

Let us go
Back to Lijiang
That glimmering star at the peak of Snow Mountain
Is my horse-caravanning great-uncle, winking
Pointing the way for us to set forth once more

The warm blood of the nomadic peoples
Gushing
We shouldered our packs
Chasing away time
In that beautiful pasture

V
***Zouhun* Manifesto**

I am not Cleopatra
I will not make you lose your will to fight
Please think it through
Before you come close to me
If you lack courage
Stay away
If you lack love in your heart
Stay away
If you lack morals and behave badly
Stay away
Afraid, just afraid
Your walking will tire out your feet

If you finally decide to *zouhun* with me
Don't complain that we cannot stay with each other throughout
the entire day
Being together constantly would be exhausting
Don't worry about me being surrounded by men
I only have you in my heart
Please think it through
Before you come close to me
Lest you
Spend three years around my house
In vain

Author's Note: Cleopatra, a voluptuous and beguiling Egyptian queen.

Translator's Note: Zouhun (走婚) *combines the verb 'to walk' and the word 'marry.' Typically I translate this as 'visiting relationship,' but others prefer the literal 'walking marriage' (as a noun) or 'walk-marry.' Retaining the original* zouhun *in the poem's title and text conveys the complexities better than any one phrase. For more discussion of this term, see* Scenes from Yongning: Media Creation in China's Na Villages *(Blumenfield Kedar, 2010).*

VI
Missing Me

Do you really miss me
In Gaoligong Mountain
In Biluo Snow Mountain
In the rushing Nu River between the two mountains?

Do you really miss me
In Baishuitai
In Shangri-La
In the tender land of the Lugu Lake Peninsula?

Deeply
Missing me deeply
No matter where your footsteps
Leave their prints
You are mine
I am yours

VII
Melting

That day
You sang to me
Not missing me is good
When you think of me
Your entirety will melt away

I smiled
You are not the snow on the mountain peak
How can you melt?

But the snow mountain in the north
Is melting
Is melting away, little by little
Who is it thinking of?

VIII
Blue tears

If
I had a pair of
Eyes like gentian flowers
The tears that would flow
Should be blue too, yes?

More than once
Sitting among the flowers on the mountaintop
Waiting for someone to arrive
Unsure whose arrival
Will finally promise me happiness
Unsure whose departure
Will hurt me for half a lifetime

If
Blue tears
Tumble down
Then just close eyes
Wearing a long white dress
Using only ears
Will suffice

Author's Commentary

1. The first poem, *Water Demon*: When I was 29, I met a photographer from Beijing and moreover, we both liked one another. We had many common interests, very close in aesthetic, and very close in personality. Although we were together for a very short time, a very deep impression was left on both sides. Later, because the separation was very far—he returned to Beijing, I stayed in Lugu Lake, and we could not be together—we stopped communicating. Six years later, we met in the Lijiang Old Town. We were together for a year, but because each of us had undergone a relatively large change, there was no way to continue together, and we separated. But we are still friends.

Water Demon is the poem I wrote after our second reunion, in the midst of the great surprise and yearning for a future together.

2. *Teapot and Flame* is a poem I wrote at the age of 37 for a man I loved at that time. He and I are both Mosuo. I really wanted to use some elements of our culture to express this, so I use the most common thing in Mosuo people's life, the teapot and the fire next to the tea, to describe our intimate relationship. But later, because the difference in our values was too great—he really emphasized the importance of money, but I am not that way—gradually we were unable to continue together.

3. *The Two of Us* is a poem written to a man I met at the age of 26. At first, on the surface he and I have a great contrast: I am very quiet and gentle, and he is very wild. But in his innermost being, there was something that deeply attracted me, a very pure way of thinking, that made me involuntarily want to get close to him. But because he had a girlfriend at the time, I persuaded myself to give him up, because I think it is immoral to rob other people's things. Later, I wrote this poem in infinite regret. I put the regret down to the fact that our gods let us be born at the wrong time to be together.

4. *Nomadic Love* is about my love experience when I was 40 years old. Because the man and I are both ethnic minorities, and our ancestors were nomadic herders, our way of life and our values are very similar. At that time, we had a lot of time to travel together, and often went to Dali, so I thought of Dali and Lijiang as two pastures of nomadic peoples. We were going to and from those pastures, just like nomads would. I hoped to live like this forever, but the man's business failure and heavy debts were too big a blow. He had no energy to interact normally with me, and I also exhausted myself from trying to persist [in the relationship]. I finally chose to give up.

Translator's Note: Dali and Lijiang are cities in northwest Yunnan Province, both tourism meccas that also attract free spirits from across China.

5. *Walking Marriage Manifesto* is a poem I wrote in a quiet time at 37 or 38 years old. At that time, I was longing for love, but not sure who to be with, so I wrote this poem to express my desire for a lover. These requirements of mine, in fact, are also the Mosuo culture's requirements on a man's character: love, good conduct, etc. I think after the age of 35, many of my views, began seeking their sources in my traditional *minzu* culture.

6. *Missing Me* was also addressed to the photographer from *Water Demon*. He expressed to me that no matter where he went, he thought of me, so I wrote this poem.

7. *Melting* is not a love poem written for any specific person. In the Mosuo language, if we like something to the extreme, miss someone to the extreme, or are extremely sad, we will use the phrase, ' [their / my] heart melted away' (心都融化了) to describe that feeling. I really like this exaggerated way of expressing of emotions. Furthermore, I have seen that as every year passed, the amount of snow on the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain became a little smaller, and I wondered, is it because of also missing someone, that it melted? So I created this poem.

Translator's note: The Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, a Naxi spirit mountain, towers over the Lijiang plain, where it can be glimpsed most days during the dry winters. From the city one can easily observe changes in its snow cover, and also watch the rains or snow fall upon the peak as microclimates often mean different weather at altitude and down below.

8. *Blue Tears* is a poem I wrote to describe my state of mind. When I am in my homeland and am feeling sad, or when I am missing someone, I will climb up to the little hillside behind my house. In the summer, many wildflowers bloom there, including blue gentian flowers. I like blue and white. I imagine that if the blue gentian flower shed tears, they would be blue. I imagine wearing a long white dress and sitting amongst the flowers, waiting for someone who loves me to appear. That's what this poem is about.

Artwork

Figure 1: Mosuo Woman 摩梭女人. Created in 2010 by Banamu.
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Figure 2: A Mosuo person, age 13, preparing for their coming-of-age ceremony. Created in 2010 by Banamu. Unauthorized reproduction prohibited.

Figure 3: Wisdom and pain. Photograph by Banamu, 2015. All rights reserved.

Figure 4: Fertility and hard work: harvesting potatoes in the Yongning plain. Photograph by Banamu, 2015. All rights reserved.

Figure 5: Men clasp hands and move in unison during jiacuo dancing, at the Circling-the-Mountain festival. Photograph by Banamu, 2015. All rights reserved.

Final Thoughts from the Author

My poetry writing began as a simple and direct form of expression. By now I intentionally and purposefully integrate a great deal of characteristic *minzu* thinking and ideas into my poems. This is an important improvement. It was only after I spent a long while moving about within Han culture that I came back to our Mosuo culture, to find that there are a lot of very advanced and humanized aspects within. They can help deal with the difficult problems of life, and they deserve to be studied and broadly disseminated.

I am very willing to present these valuable aspects of Mosuo culture through my poetry, and also through other literary and artistic works, in order to bring beautiful and good feelings to humankind!

About the Author / Artist

Banamu (芭纳木) is from Dapo Village in Yongning Township, part of Ninglang County, Lijiang, in China's Yunnan Province. She graduated from Yunnan Arts University, with a degree in Fine Arts. She is a poet, writer of film scripts and prose, photographer, visual artist, and creator of documentary film materials. The Mosuo are an ancient, enchanting and fascinating people. Their extended family culture and walking marriage culture are famous throughout the world. Through her artwork, Banamu's goal is to present and sing the praises of the people living within this culture, and to share her homeland's beautiful scenery.

About the Translator / Compiler

Tami Blumenfield is an anthropologist from Wisconsin. in the northern United States near Lake Michigan. She is a writer, photographer, filmmaker, exhibit producer, curator, singer, and translator. She began visiting regions where Mosuo people live in 2001 and returned whenever possible over the next eighteen years. In 2019, she helped support and translate for an encounter between Mosuo women and feminist organizations in Italy. She is currently working on several projects aimed at sharing voices of Mosuo people with non-Chinese-speaking audiences.

Further Reading

Blumenfield Kedar, Tami. 2010. *Scenes from Yongning: Media Creation in China's Na Villages*. PhD diss., University of Washington.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix I

Mosuo Love, A Poetry Medley: Original Chinese-Language Version
By Banamu

摩梭爱情（组诗）
芭纳木

I
水妖

你说
我是水妖
泸沽湖的水妖
海藻一样长长的头发
纠缠着你
一年十二月
牵着你的心儿跑
你问何时可以
回到我身边
让你好好来爱我

云儿一直飘在山巅
月儿总要圆五天
当我的笑还在唇边
快快来到我身边
当小溪和小溪在尽头相汇
当树枝和树枝相互缠绕
我们永在一起不分离
直到泸沽湖的水结成了冰
直到玉龙雪山的冰化成了水

2
茶罐与火苗

亲亲的哥哥
你是火塘里那个茶罐
我是那叶炽烈的火苗
你我相依相偎

亲亲的哥哥
你是阿普跟前的茶
我是阿依跟前的盐
放我们在茶罐里相会
我将你舔烫沸腾
你融化我在你怀里

亲亲的哥哥
燃尽我变成灰
烧裂你成碎片
阿普的铲
堆我在青刺果树根
阿依的撮箕
扔你在青刺果树的脚下
生命的尽头
我们还在一处

注：阿普 摩梭语里老爷爷的称谓 阿依 摩梭语里老奶奶的称谓

3
我们俩

我俩天生一对
你坦诚我率真
我唯美你纯净
我们的幸运数是 7
吉普车是我们的最爱
生我的那一天
阿巴朵色打了个盹
让我生晚了时辰

没能跟你成一对
那也没关系
让神后悔去吧
我们俩没关系
此生做知己
你给我的是勇气
我给你的是智慧
冷暖一起感知
酸甜相互慰藉

注：阿巴朵色 摩梭神话里的大神，爱搞怪恶作剧。

4
游牧爱情

请叫我游牧民族的后代吧
夏天在丽江
冬天要转场大理
一年年
一年年
岁月它好美

喜欢雪水流下
装扮了容颜
再润泽爱你的心儿
喜欢洱海的风
梳过长发
替你撩弄我的耳垂

走吧我们
去大理
洱海宽阔的胸怀
像极了我那织麻布的外婆
她能容纳我们的小忧伤

走吧我们
回丽江
雪山顶上闪烁的那颗星星
是我赶马的舅公在眨眼

指引着我们再次出发

游牧民族的热血
喷涌时
我们背着行囊
驱赶时光
在那美丽的牧场

5
走婚宣言

我不是克莉奥帕特拉
可足以让你失去斗志
请你考虑好
再靠近我
没有勇气
别来
没有爱心
别来
品行不好
更别来
怕就怕
只是走累了你的脚

如若真和我走婚
不要抱怨不能够朝夕相随
总在一起会疲劳
也不要担心我被男人围绕
我的心里只有你
请你考虑好
再靠近我
免得
在我屋后转三年
也枉然

注：克莉奥帕特拉 埃及艳后

6
想我

真的想我吗
在高黎贡山
在碧罗雪山
在两山之间奔流的怒江

真的想我吗
在白水台
在香格里拉
在温柔乡的泸沽湖半岛

深深的
深深的想着我
无论你的足迹
印到了哪里
你是我的
我是你的

7
融化了

那天
你唱给我
不想我还好
想起我来
你整个都要融化了
我笑了
你又不是山顶的雪
怎么会融化
不过北面的雪山
在融化呢
一点点的融化呢
它在想着谁呢

8

蓝眼泪

假如
我有一双
龙胆草花那样的眼睛
流下的泪水
应该也是蓝色的吧

不止一次
坐在山顶的花丛
等着某个人的到来
不清楚谁的到来
终将许我幸福
不清楚谁的离去
会疼痛我半生

假如
蓝色的眼泪
它会落下
那就把眼睛闭上吧
穿着白白的长裙呢
只用耳朵
就好了

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Mosuo Songs and Dances: From the Villages to the University Campus

YANG Lifen (Nianzhe Xiaoma)*

Translated and edited by Tami Blumenfield**

Abstract

This article discusses the author's efforts to tell the story of Mosuo matriculture and myths by adapting original Mosuo songs and dances into versions that can be shared with mainstream Chinese audiences and local students. The author, a Mosuo person, has collected folk songs, transcribed their lyrics, notated their melodies, and translated them into Chinese. The article also discusses large-scale public performance pieces featuring the author's students that involve stylized Mosuo clothing, singing in both Narua (Mosuo) and Chinese languages, and tightly choreographed movements and dancing. These performances were exceptionally well received, and demonstrated the possibility of presenting artistic creations based on Mosuo heritage to the general public. Some of the performances are at the local level, while some have been presented at and won awards at the provincial level. Not only do they preserve folk songs of a matrilineal culture, these efforts also present a matrilineal ethos to Chinese audiences with very different kinship systems. The article presents various Mosuo songs, including their translated meanings, and discusses different dance and singing performances.

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Keywords: cultural transmission; Mosuo music; Narua songs; intangible cultural heritage; matrilineal culture

抽象的

本文讨论了作者通过将原始的摩梭歌舞改编成可以与中国主流观众和当地学生分享的版本来讲述摩梭母文化和神话故事的努力。 作者是摩梭人，搜集民歌，抄录歌词，谱写旋律，并翻译成中文。 文章还讨论了以作者的学生为特色的大型公共表演作品，其中包括程式化的摩梭服饰、用纳鲁语和摩梭语演唱的歌曲，以及精心编排的动作和舞蹈。 这些表演受到了极大的欢迎，并展示了创作适合主流消费的作品的能力。 有的在地方演出，有的在省级演出并获奖。 他们不仅保留了母系文化的民歌，这些努力还向具有不同血缘制度的中国观众呈现了一种母系气质。 文章介绍了各种摩梭歌曲，包括它们的翻译含义，并讨论了不同的舞蹈和歌唱表演。 最后，本文讨论了在大学环境中教授学生民族歌舞的挑战和经验。

关键词：文化传播； 摩梭音乐； 纳鲁歌曲； 非物质文化遗产； 母系文化

Résumé

Ce texte présente les efforts de l'auteure pour raconter l'histoire des mythes et de la matriculture des Mosuos, en adaptant des chants et des dances traditionnelles de façon à pouvoir les partager avec le grand public chinois et les étudiants de la région. L'auteure, une personne mosuo, a recueilli des chants folkloriques locaux, a transcrit leurs lyriques et leur mélodies, et les a traduits en langue chinoise. Elle discute ici les prestations publiques à grande échelle mettant en vedette ces étudiants, avec au programme des costumes mosuos stylisés, des chants en Naru et en Mosul, des dances et des mouvements chorégraphiés précis. Ces spectacles ont été exceptionnellement bien reçus, et ont démontrés la possibilité de présenter au grand public des créations artistiques basées sur l'héritage mosuo. Quelques-uns des spectacles furent présenté au niveau local, pendant que d'autres sont été présentés au niveau provincial où ils se sont mérité des prix. Non seulement, permettent-ils de préserver les chants folkloriques d'une culture matrilinéaire, mais ils démontrent l'ethos matrilinéaire aux audiences chinoises habituées à des systèmes de parenté très différents. Ce texte inclut plusieurs chants mosuos, avec leur traduction en Anglais, est une discussion des prestations dansées et chantées. En conclusion, l'auteure commente les expériences et les défis rencontrés dans l'enseignement des chants et danses folkloriques en milieu universitaire.

Mots-clés : transmission culturelle, musique Mosuo, chansons de Narua, patrimoine culturel immatériel; culture matrilinéaire

Introduction: Integrity, Humanity, and Cultural Inheritance in Yunnan Province

I was born near Lugu Lake, in Ninglang County, Lijiang, China. I am a music professor at Lijiang Normal College in southwest China's Yunnan Province, and I am mainly engaged in vocal music teaching within a Music Education program. As one of the few Mosuo university teachers, I have a special mission to inherit and disseminate local culture. The excellent traditional song and dance culture of the Chinese Mosuo people has been created and accumulated by the Mosuo people for generations, over a long horizon of social practice. This is the precious spiritual heritage of the Mosuo people and the spiritual embodiment of our unique way of thinking. The excellent traditional cultures of all ethnic groups in China contain rich ideas. Their integrity, humanity, and inheritance are indispensable for the establishment and construction of a new value system and cultural system of socialism with Chinese characteristics today. These cultural elements and values are also valuable resources for strengthening the ideological and moral development of contemporary college students, and therefore including them in a humanistic science curriculum in colleges and universities is vitally important.

The inheritance and promotion of China's outstanding traditional culture is a major issue for college students in the contemporary historical era. This is also a crucial component of a *minzu* nationality's plan for strengthening as they grow and develop over the longer term, and for building self-reliance. Accordingly, teachers in colleges and universities must have the courage to explore and dare to innovate, in order to earnestly improve the ideas, models, and methods for ideological and political education work of contemporary college students.

In order to strive to create a good atmosphere for college students to inherit and carry forward the vibrant traditional cultures of China, the Singing and Dancing Performance Major of Lijiang Teachers College (丽江师专歌舞表演专业) has set up courses on Chinese National Folk Dance, Yunnan National Folk Dance, Yunnan Folk Song and Dance, Yunnan Representative Song and Dance, Intangible Cultural Heritage Song and Dance, Lijiang National Folk Song and Dance and so on. The talent training program demonstrates *minzu* freedom, a harmonious and innovative environment, and an atmosphere of openness and liveliness. The program nurtures one generation after another of high-quality and strongly directed individuals who will build up our nation and take up our efforts.

I am a native Mosuo person who grew up in a Mosuo village. I am very familiar with and understand Mosuo folk song and dance. As someone who has always loved her own local culture, to introduce the traditional song and dance of Mosuo to the campus is my

happiest thing. Therefore I took the initiative to develop the courses entitled Intangible Cultural Heritage Song and Dance, Lijiang National Folk Song and Dance, Yunnan Folk Song and Singing and others. I carefully wrote the syllabus for each course, obtained approval from the administration to teach it, and integrated local songs and dances into the teaching. Although these courses have just begun, I am happy to do this. I hope that through teaching we can let more people understand the Lijiang ethnic minority songs and dances. I strive to turn these courses into characteristic courses of Lijiang's local universities. This is also a better way to spread and pass on our culture.

My Journey through Mosuo Music

Naming Practices and Cultural Identity
Growing up in a Mosuo village, I fully experienced the life and culture of a large matrilineal family. In the Mosuo family where I grew up, the children born to the same mother all live together forever. The children of all the sisters in the family live together under the same roof as well. We call one another “brother” and “sister.” All female elders in the family of the same generation as one’s mother are collectively called "Ah-Ma."

For us Mosuo people, a name is just a symbol, and there is no requirement to follow the mother or father's surname. When someone asks about you, you must first tell them which house you are part of, and tell them the clan name to which the house belongs. Mosuo people generally don't ask, "What's your name?" Instead, they will ask “Nong er ni er ni?” or “Nong er ni er bi gu?”

Er means which ethnic group, or which family. Translated, it means, “Which one are you? What is the last name of your house?” For example, if someone asks me my name, I will answer: “I am Nianzhe Xiaoma.” So you put the name of the house in front, and then add your personal name.

As with many Mosuo children, my mother's family name became my surname.[1] My mother's family name is ‘Nianzhe,’ so my name became 'Nianzhe Xiao Ma.' 'Nianzhe' is my surname, and ‘Xiao Ma’ is a shorter version of my given name, ‘Jinruo Duma.’ You see, the eldest sister in our family is called ‘Danshi Duma,’ the second sister is called ‘Sona Duma,’ the third sister is called ‘Yongzhen Duma.’ All four sisters have ‘Duma’ as part of their names. I am the youngest, so everyone calls me ‘Little Duma’ (Xiao Duma), which shortens to ‘Xiao Ma.’

When I started elementary school, my brother gave me a Han name, 'Yang Lifen,' to use at school. Because that was my school name, it was also used on my official identification

1 Translator’s note: This contrasts with the standard practice among Han people and those elsewhere in China, where children take their father’s family name as surnames. The author is making an implicit comparison with those practices.

card. Many Mosuo people know ‘Nianzhe Xiao Ma’ but do not know who ‘Yang Lifen’ is. Let me tell you a joke. A friend I met in Yunnan Nationalities Village in 1993 came to my house with a picture of me and told my mother, “Your daughter Yang Lifen is my friend.”

My mother responded, “Which Yang Lifen? I don't know her…” Because my mom doesn't know my Han Chinese name. Only after looking at the photos of me did she know that her little daughter was called Yang Lifen! Ha ha…

“If you can talk, you can sing, and if you can walk, you can dance.”
From a Mosuo Village to the Yunnan Academy of Arts
The Mosuo people have a saying that "If you can talk, you can sing, and if you can walk, you can dance." This sentence is not false at all. In Mosuo places you will hardly meet people with incomplete five tones [on the pentatonic scale], that is, without a full vocal range. I could sing Mosuo songs once I could talk and dance Mosuo-style once I could walk. Of us seven brothers and sisters, all of whom can sing and dance, it was my Eldest Brother who was nearly recruited by the provincial song and dance troupe to become a singer. Third Sister was a dancer, and at the age of thirteen, she was recruited by the county's cultural troupe to become a dancer. Second Sister is a famous singer in the village. She is nicknamed ‘Nianzhe Song Zuying’ (Song Zuying is a famous soprano singer in China), and my Third Brother's village nickname is ‘Nianzhe Yan Weiwen’ (Yan Weiwen is a famous tenor singer in China). My eldest sister and my third sister also have beautiful singing voices.

As for me, I was a little singer in our village since I was small. Even before I could speak Chinese, I could sing ‘See the World's Toiling People Liberated’ from the Chinese opera *Honghu Red Guards*. When I was in the third grade of elementary school, I represented my school in a competition at the Yongning Township Primary School. I still remember what I sang: ‘Whenever I Walked through the Teacher's Window.’ Throughout elementary school, junior high school, and high school, I was always part of the class artistic team. When I was in junior high school at the Yongning Middle School, every Wednesday there would be a movie screening outdoors. Students would watch movies alongside people who lived in nearby villages. Before each screening, the screening master would have me and a few classmates take turns singing. People in the villages near the school especially loved to hear me sing. In middle school I lived on the school campus, and usually ate there as well. But on Wednesdays, we did not have evening study hall because of the movie screenings, and we could go home for dinner. Once, when I was walking back to school after dinner at home and had almost reached the school, several aunties in front of me were walking very fast. One said, "Let's go faster, I can already hear Nianzhe Ma singing." It seems that when I was a child, I was a little star of the Mosuo villages! Ha ha…

I have loved singing since I was a child, but I never thought that I would one day make a career out of singing. My entrance to the Yunnan Academy of Arts also happened by chance. One evening in 1993, before graduating from the high school I attended in

Ninglang County, my homeroom teacher came to keep watch over the evening study session. He was chatting about which students could be admitted to what school, and suddenly he said, "Yang Lifen, your voice is so incredible, how come you have not considered testing into the Art College? In two or three days, the Yunnan Academy of Arts will be recruiting." It was the first time I had heard that I could enter the Arts Academy. When I left, I casually mentioned this to my eldest brother and third sister who worked in the county town, near my school. Third Sister was very happy, because she was a member of the song and dance troupe and likes to sing and dance. She said she could take me.

So we two sisters bought a train ticket and went to Kunming, the provincial capital. When I got to the examination site, I sang a folk song of the Mosuo coming-of-age ceremony. There was no song score, and I definitely did not know what key I sang in. I had never seen a piano, nor did I know how to sightread music or sing by ear.

Based on my good throat and strong voice, I went to take the entrance exam for the Yunnan Academy of Arts (云南艺术学院) in Kunming. The first year I did not pass, because I could not play piano and did not know music theory. Instead, after graduating from high school, I moved to Kunming to work at the Yunnan Minzu Village. During that year, I used all my free time to study with teachers from the Academy of Arts, taking courses in vocal music, piano, sight-reading, and solfeggio. After much hard work, in 1994 I gained admission to the Music Education Department of Yunnan Academy of Arts. That was the beginning of my music dream.

Acclimating to University-Style Singing: A Bumpy Road
At the university I studied operatic-style vocal technique. I am a minority *minzu* person, but in school I sang Schubert's *Lullaby*; Handel's *Hallelujah*; and Italian songs, like *Spanish Girl* [*La Spagnola*, by Vincenzo di Chiara], Puccini's *For Art*, *For Love* [*Vissi d'arte*, *visa d'amore*], and *My Dear Father* [*O mio babbino caro*]; and other foreign works. The teacher required us to sing in Italian. After that, Mosuo folk songs were also sung by me into an operatic style. After learning the *bel canto* singing method, the way I sang Mosuo folk songs sounded awful.

I was depressed and for a while, I could not sing. I experienced a long period of unnatural singing, during which I did not like the sound of my own voice. This lasted all the way until I began my professional career at my university. I started teaching and at the same time, I pondered the correct way to sing. I gradually decided that singing should actually be done with a natural voice. I think the most natural way to produce sound is also the most scientific way to sing. Now I teach my students to use natural singing methods. I never demand that students sing in a *bel canto* or ethnic group style, and tell them instead that however their body feels most comfortable is the correct way to sing. I often ask students to perceive how they feel when they sing. I tell them, "If your body is very relaxed and natural when singing, then this singing state is correct, and if even one muscle of your

body is uncomfortable when singing, then this singing method must be wrong." This is my singing philosophy.

As I encountered new ways of singing, I experienced first a natural approach to singing, then an unnatural one, and then once again returned to a natural approach. After all, my singing experience began when I was a child. I sang Mosuo folk songs, and listening to Mosuo folk songs was the happiest thing I could do. The lullabies that mothers sing to their little ones are themselves traditional Mosuo folk songs. Listening to my mother telling the story of the goddess Gemu and singing the ode to the goddess Gemu were very special experiences. Through these and other ways, the Mosuo matrilineal culture has been deeply imprinted on me. I love my Mosuo family, I love my Mosuo culture, and I really love my Mosuo folk songs.

Bridging Folk Practices and Teaching

In line with the mission of local universities to inherit and carry forward traditional culture, I have always wanted to introduce local customary songs and dances with unique characteristics to the university campus. As it happened, I had an excellent opportunity when the university began advocating the construction of a special curriculum. I used the opportunity to integrate some traditional local folk songs and dances into the teaching program. I am the director of the Vocal and Dance Performance major, and in order to develop an excellent training program that will help students develop their professional talents, I have done a lot of research and investigations. After discussions with colleagues at the Lijiang Dongba Research Institute and elsewhere, I set up special courses such as Lijiang National Folk Song and Dance, Yunnan Folk Song Singing, Intangible Cultural Heritage Song and Dance Transmission and so on. I write the syllabi and learning objectives myself and am personally responsible for these courses' teaching, sometimes by delivering the course myself, and sometimes coordinating experts to teach classes. On the one hand, this makes a strong contribution to local universities' efforts to inherit and develop traditional cultures of China. On the other hand, this helps pass along the song and dance cultures of the various ethnic groups of Lijiang. I was very enthusiastic about undertaking this effort. Although we have only just begun building the curriculum and have not yet achieved strong pedagogical results, I have found that students are very interested in such courses. I am very willing to continue my research and promotion efforts accordingly.

Creating Ahma Gualu

At present, the most distinctive work that has been promoted on campus is the *Ahma Gualu* of the Mosuo people, which I developed with my Third Sister Yang Lilan and with other university experts. Professor He Guilian helped arrange the music and create the choreography. This song medley takes segments from several different aspects of the Mosuo matrilineal culture and combines them together, using modern musical production

techniques. A lullaby, a coming-of-age ceremony song, a song from the Mosuo *jiacuo* dancing, a love song, and other traditional Mosuo songs like these are all included. The idea is that this song medley expresses all the phases of a Mosuo woman's life as she grows from childhood into adulthood. When a little girl is born, *Ahma* (Mother) sings lullabies to her. When she turns thirteen and thus reaches maturity, she will undergo the traditional Mosuo coming-of-age ceremony, accompanying it with song. After the rite of passage, she will officially become part of the social milieu. She will put on the beautiful Mosuo garments, participate in bonfire dancing and other communal events, and fall in love. Then she will sing the 'walking marriage' song, and finally become a mother herself. This is the path she will follow, which inspires our songs (see Figure 1 and video links 1-4, below).

The title of the work is *Ahma Gualu*. *Gualu* in the Mosuo language means 'jar' or 'canister' (罐子) but can also be translated as 'treasure.' *Ahma Gualu* means 'Mother's Treasure.' In the Mosuo traditional culture, females are celebrated but males are not denigrated (重女不轻男), but in fact, having a girl in the family is the happiest thing. The work *Ahma Gualu* was created from elements of Mosuo *yuan shengtai* songs,[2] mainly featuring a small-group chorus of women. The singers sing in the Mosuo language, Naru. Elements of four original Mosuo songs are included: the lullaby *Ahma Gualu*, the coming-of-age song *Mu Ruo Lai Dieh Tan Ji Ze* (translation: daughter has grown up to become a young woman), the dancing song *Adu Ohr Lai Qiu Qiu* (translation: friends are all together), and the ancient Mosuo song *Ahabala* (translation: 'Ahabala' is a sigh or exclamation without specific meaning), and so on. To the traditional song elements, this song medley builds in a two-part harmony. It is a work that adds modern concepts and formats to the original charming songs. Deep philosophical questions are expressed through the songs, like "Who am I?" "Where am I from?" and "Where am I going?" These are questions asked among people on the earth while looking toward the heavens. Mosuo people have their own existential questions related to the birth of a new life, the joys of growing up, and the beautiful glory of living.

The first part of the song medley depicts a kind Mosuo *ahma* (mother) holding a child and singing a lullaby. The second part, describing the growth of the daughter, holds the traditional 13-year-old coming-of-age ceremony of the Mosuo people. The song interprets the joyful mood of the daughter's aunt when she grows up. The third part describes the daughter growing up, singing and dancing happily with her friends around the fire at the bonfire party, singing the ancient Mosuo song *Ahabala*, and dancing the cheerful circle dance of the Mosuo people. This work won the Excellence Award in the Yunnan Local Songwriting and Singing Competition in 2020.

2 Translator's Note: *Yuan shengtai* translates directly as 'original ecology', which is obscure in English. They actually are songs typically sung by villagers that have not undergone adaptation for contemporary audiences. They are sung *a cappella* without electronic or 'modern' (non-Indigenous) instruments. So wooden flute would be fine, clarinet would not. In practice, it also refers to an Indigenous music song.

Figure 1: Song Score 1, Ahma Gualu *(Lullaby) Song Sheet*

Video 1: *Rehearsing Dancing for Mosuo Songs at the University in Lijiang* (15 secs): https://youtu.be/E91hTc9hNm8

Video 2: *Mosuo Music at the University: Lijiang 2019* (16 secs): https://youtu.be/ldhRDn41vjM

Video 3: *Ahabala Song Medley Performed for the Yunnan Bentu Creative Song Competition* (1m57s): https://youtu.be/-bWGqD5lKmw

Video 4: *Three Song New Years' Medley of Mosuo Music: 2019* (4m30s): https://youtu.be/fxZvvjD4OPo

Approximate Translation of Ahma Gualu *Lyrics*

1. *Ahma Gualu*
   Oh, Ahma's treasure, you are Ahma's good little baby, Ahma's treasure!
   May you grow up healthy and happy!
   阿妈的宝贝呀，你是阿妈的乖宝宝，阿妈的宝贝呀！
   你要健康快乐地成长！

2. *Mu Ruo Lai Dieh Tan Ji Ze*
   The beautiful Lugu Lake ushers in the morning sun,
   The goddess Gemu is draped in an auspicious morning glow,
   The kind Mosuo Ahma, why are you so happy?
   Ah…It is because my daughter has grown up.
   美丽的泸沽湖迎来了朝阳，
   格姆女神披上了吉祥的朝霞，
   善良的摩梭阿妈呀，

为何这样高兴，
是因为女儿长成人。

3. *Adu Ohr Lai Qiu Qiu*
Come, come, come and dance
Dance until the sky grows light, return [home] only then
When friends and buddies can be together,
It's like living amidst the flowers.
来呀来呀来打跳，
跳到天亮才回去，
朋友伙伴在一起，
就像生在花丛中。

4. *Ahabala*
Ahabala *is a phrase that has no specific meaning and is used to create a backdrop for Mosuo folk songs. The Mosuo people collectively refer to the Mosuo folk songs as* Ahabala. *It is generally used as the starting tune of Mosuo folk songs and the basis for improvisation.*

Improvisation and Mosuo Folk Songs

Ahma Gualu is a work created entirely with inspiration from traditional Mosuo songs, and only represents a selection of traditional songs and dances. There are many different kinds of traditional Mosuo folk songs, including labour songs, songs related to our customs and rituals, children's songs, mountain songs, songs in minor keys, and so on. The biggest feature of the songs is the improvisation of the lyrics. Therefore, the people who sing Mosuo folk songs must possess intelligence and wits. Otherwise, it is not really possible to sing Mosuo folk songs.

Related to the improvisation of Mosuo folk songs, let me tell a story I heard as a child. There was Mosuo grand-uncle in the village who was very good at singing. He would make up half-spoken, half-sung songs, what we could call Mosuo rap, based on each person's personality. The story is that when this uncle was young, he was in a visiting relationship (*zouhun*) with a Mosuo woman in the village. Later he began to like a girl from a neighboring village as well. When his *zouhun* partner found out about this matter, she was very angry, so she gathered her female friends together to discuss how to deal with this third party. In response, the uncle made up a rap teasing them about their gathering. He used the form of rap to describe the behavior and manner of each person present, portraying their characteristics and personalities incisively and vividly. The lyrics were so humorous and witty that listeners were unsure whether to laugh or to cry. The song and its lyrics also reflected the good humor and cleverness of this singer.

Labour Songs

The Mosuo people also have their own labour songs, the most famous of which is *Wanla Gua* ('threshing rice song'). This is the song that people sing when threshing the harvested rice stalks. It shows how Mosuo people create their own entertainment when working together. The lyrics are jocular and funny. These songs are full of teasing and joking. Mosuo people love to crack jokes, which may explain why the lyrics are so funny. These lyrics, like those discussed above, are also improvised (see Figure 2).

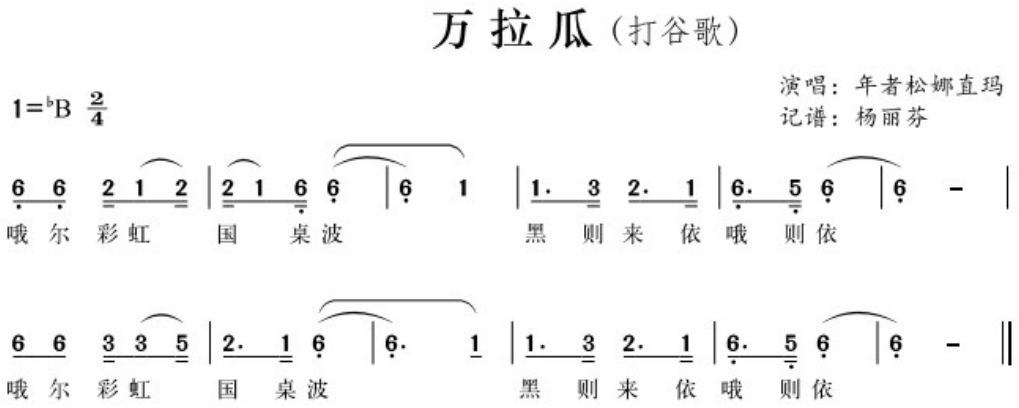

Figure 2: Song Score 2, Wan La Gua *(Threshing Song) Song Sheet; Performer: Nianzhe Songna Zhina; Composition: Yang Lifen*

Gemu Goddess Songs

Folk songs related to Mosuo legends are also important. One example is the song *Ode to the Gemu Goddess*. The lyrics are in the form of question-and-answer, and the song is usually sung as a duet. It relates to a myth and legend of the Mosuo people. There is a mountain in the east of Yongning, looking over the whole of Yongning. Like a reclining lion, Mosuo people call her Lion Mountain, because there is a beautiful legend. It is said that in the Mosuo village under the Lion Mountain, there was a very beautiful Mosuo girl. She was hardworking, beautiful and kind. She could weave rainbows in the sky. It is said that in the seventh month of the lunar calendar (usually late August or early September), the gods always destroyed the crops and livestock in Yongning by heavy rain and hail. It is said that on the 25th day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, the gods captured the cattle, sheep and the girl Gemu in the village. The Mosuo people in the Yongning basin all cried together. In a panic, the gods let go of the girl Gemu. She fell on the Lion Mountain and turned into the goddess Gemu.

It is said that the kind goddess Gemu often rides a white horse to visit the villages where the Mosuo people live and bless the area. Then the people and animals will be prosperous, the weather will be good, and the grain will be plentiful. The Mosuo women will be blessed with beauty, happy marriage, and increase of children and grandchildren.

Thus, Lion Mountain became the goddess mountain worshiped by the local Mosuo people. In the pine forest at the southern foot of the mountain, there is also a temple, upon whose wall hangs a portrait of the goddess Gemu riding a deer. Every year on the 25th day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, a grand round-the-mountain activity has been held here. The Mosuo language calls it *Gemu gua*, which means 'turning around the Gemu mountain' (cf. Blumenfield 2023, Cao 2020).

Everyone gathers at the foot of Gemu Mountain, burns incense and prays for blessings from the goddess, so that the coming year will have good weather. So the Mosuo people have the song *O'er Lidi Gemu* in praise of the goddess Gemu, translated as *Our Goddess Gemu* or *Ode to Goddess Gemu* (see Figure 3).

As mentioned, *Ode to the Goddess of Gemu* uses a question-and-answer method to sing about the Goddess Gemu. Some lyrics include:

> Question: *What does our beautiful Goddess Gemu use for her headdress?*
> Answer: *Our beautiful Goddess Gemu, she wears white clouds as her headdress.*
> Question: *Our beautiful goddess Gemu, what does she use for clothes?*
> Answer: *Our beautiful goddess Gemu, she makes clothes out of the green Lugu Lake.*
> Question: *Our beautiful Goddess Gemu, what does she use for her cushions?*
> Answer: *Our beautiful goddess Gemu, the Yongning basin, which is rich in natural resources, is her cushion.*

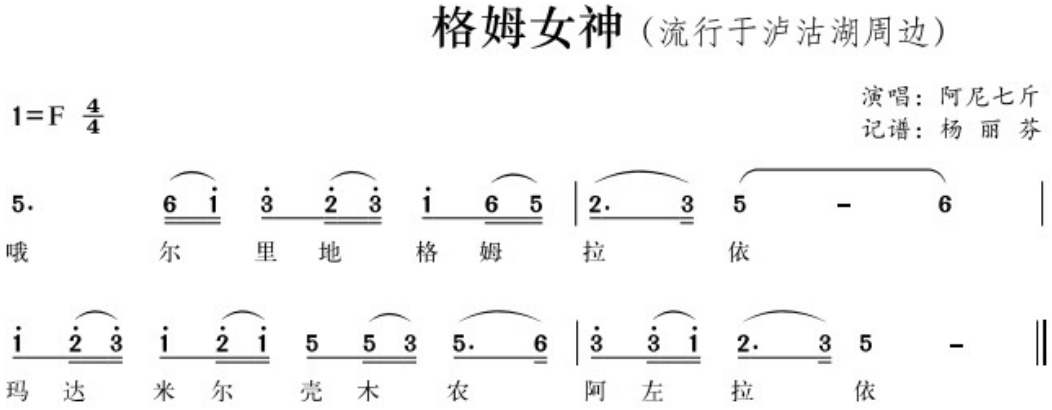

Figure 3: Song Score 3, Gemu Goddess *(popular in the area around Lugu Lake); Performer: Ahni Oijin; Composition: Yang Lifen*

From the activities of worshiping the goddess and its myths and legends, we can get a glimpse of the important position of women in the social life of the Mosuo people.

Children's Songs and Lullabies

Mosuo children's songs like *Ahma Gualu* have no specific lyrics. That is, one simply hums and sings. Sometimes there are words, they might be the same lyrics as sung before, or

they may be improvised. The lyrics are to the effect of 'Ahma's treasure' (阿妈宝宝), 'Ahma's well-behaved baby' (宝宝乖乖), and similar phrases repeated over and over again. The lyrics only mention the mother, because the Mosuo people practice visiting marriage (*zouhun*). The child is raised in the mother's home, supported by the child's mother and her brothers and sisters.

Love Songs

Many types of Mosuo folk songs exist. Some express love, some express family affection, and some express longing. Different lyrics can be sung to the same melody on different occasions. For example, one set of lyrics helps express love. If you like someone, you can sing "Golden flowers and silver flowers bloom together, are the golden birds and silver birds drinking water from the same bowl?"

If the other party is willing, they will answer "Golden flowers and silver flowers all bloom together, so of course the golden bird and the silver bird can drink from the same bowl." If the person does not want to start a relationship, they can simply answer, "I'm not from this area, I am just passing through." This is a way for young men and women to use a song to test whether they like one another.

Another set of lyrics expresses unswerving love: "I will build a wooden bridge and wait for you. If the wooden bridge breaks down, I will build a stone bridge and wait for you." These lyrics show that the *zouhun* (walking marriage) of the Mosuo people is built on a foundation of feelings. Just like a sea, these feelings can dry up.

Mosuo people usually speak very politely, with deep care for 'face.' Face is very important in Mosuo culture. Because of the so-called 'face culture,' people will not easily refuse or express their emotions. So speaking is always very oblique and indirect. Even speaking against someone is euphemistic. For example, if you meet someone you do not like or whose character is not good, you can only say so tactfully, and you cannot be too direct. For example, when you meet a romantic and irresponsible boy, a girl will sing "Tall and Upright Poplar Tree, it's a pity that the tree trunk is eaten by moths." It means that you are handsome, but it's a pity that your character is not very good.

To take another example, when you meet a girl who "says 'three' in the morning and 'four' in the afternoon,"[3] you will sing "The bamboo on the mountain is graceful and beautiful, but it's a pity that it can only be made into dung." First, sing about her beautiful appearance, and only then, express regret that she is a person who does not know how to respect herself.

3 Translator's note: This expression, *zhao san mu si* 朝三暮四, is an idiom expressing that someone is indecisive and changeable; even after something is already settled upon, they may change their mind later.

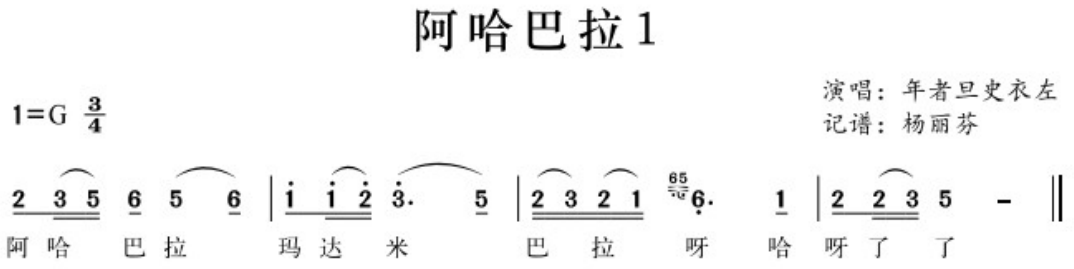

Figure 4: Song Score 4, Ahabala 1, *Performer: Nianzhe Danshi Yizuo; Composition: Yang Lifen*

Among Mosuo songs expressing love, there is a very famous one called *A Zhu Wei*. *Azhu* means 'friend' in Mosuo language. However, this word is rarely used in the Mosuo area, because of the shy culture of the Mosuo people. The brothers and sisters of a family generally do not use this word when they are together because this word generally refers to walking marriage partners. The lyrics are as follows: "Hey Azhu, Azhu, the birds in the sky are flying higher and higher, and I cannot see you even if I look. My heart is shattered" (see Figure 5).

It expresses that the Mosuo people uphold and respect free love. Feelings are an important factor in maintaining the intimate relationship of two people. Money and status have nothing to do with it. If the feelings are strong, they will stay together. If they no longer have feelings for one another, they will separate. The child will be raised by the woman and uncle, and the uncle will take on the responsibility usually shouldered by a father in Han Chinese and other families. The child grows up in the mother's family. Even if the parents separate, this has no effect on the child. Mosuo people have complete freedom of marriage and love.

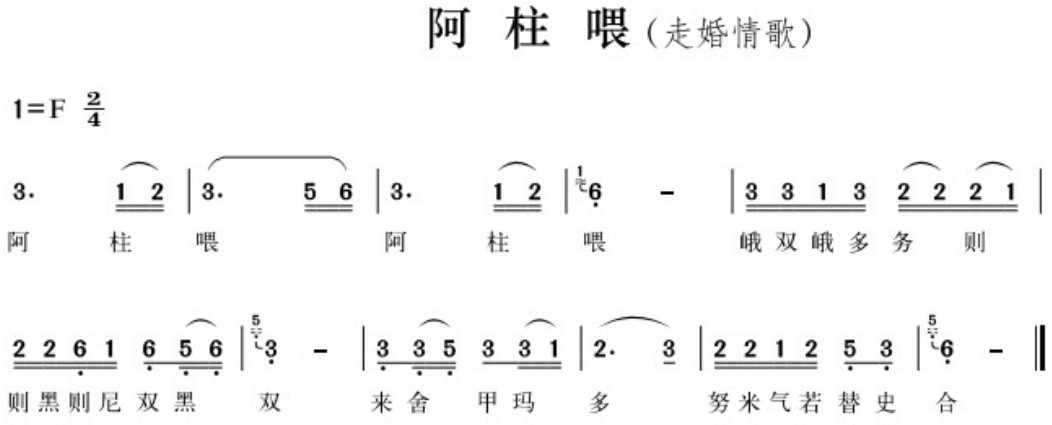

Figure 5: Song Score 5, Azhu Wei *(Zouhun Love Song)*

Mother, Family, and Friendship Songs

Songs that express feelings about family and friendship, especially Mosuo folk songs singing about the mother, are particularly abundant. The reason for so many songs about mothers is that Mosuo families are matrilineal. Accordingly, there are many symbols of the mother-venerating culture for Mosuo people. There are as many songs about mothers as hairs on a cow. One tune can be paired with lyrics with many different emotions. The Ahabala melody offers an example (cf. Yang 2018) (see Figures 4 and 6).

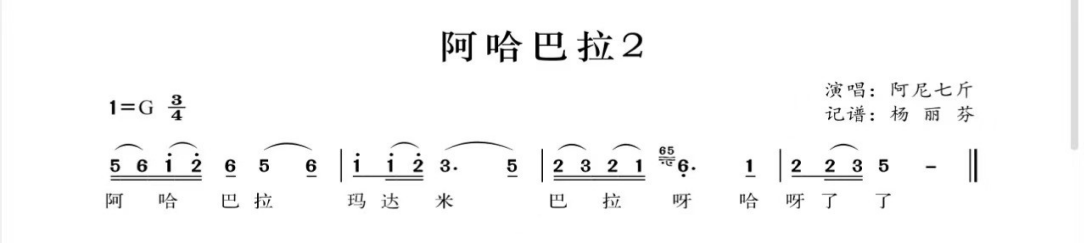

Figure 6: Song Score 6, Ahabala 2*; Performer: Ahni Qijin; Composition: Yang Lifen*

The first kind of lyrics are those that sing the praises of the mother: *zhiguduose zhi*, *zhiluojiu*, *niao ma ni heng duo mata* (直古多色，直罗九，鸟妈你哼多妈塔). (Translation: Crossing over many mountains, crossing many rivers, I never saw anyone as kind as my mother.)[4] Another example is "I don't want to be rich and prosperous, I just want my mother to live a long life and reach a hundred years old." This expresses the hearts of many Mosuo people: as long as their mothers live, it is the happiest thing.

The second type of lyric expresses longing for one's deceased mother: *xi-na-lai-li-dan-duo-ta*, *Ahma lai li duo-ma-ta* [吸纳来历单多塔，阿妈来历多马塔]. (Translation: It's possible to see to the end of the lake's waters, but I cannot see my mother.)

The third type of lyric expresses the daughter's reluctance to marry away from home: *A-ma-xi- la-a-ma-chan*, *Mo-he-nong-chan-ta-na* (阿妈喜啦阿妈占，吗喜侬占塔吗以). (Translation: My mother raised me, so I take care of my mother. I am unwilling to go take care of someone who did not raise me.")

The fourth kind fills in the mood of joy: *Aha ba la chisuo cao*, *Naruo namu Banbanni* (啊哈吧啦吃所卓，纳若纳姆斑斑尼). (Translation: Ahabala, this song is a flower of happiness blooming in the heart of our Mosuo daughter).

Other lyrics express feelings about being away from home, with special reference to distant mothers. These include: "The home of my mother who raised me cannot be abandoned just because it is impoverished." This conveys that in the Mosuo family, we must support each other and help each other, without becoming fixated on 'you' or 'me.'

4 Translator's note: The author provided Chinese phonetic approximations for the Na language words, rendered here in both pinyin and Chinese character form. The author also provided a Chinese-language translation for the Na words, which I have in turn translated into English.

Another lyric expresses, “I am very happy living away from home. I only fear that my mother who raised me misses me.”

A final, sentimental lyric comments, “The more I travel along this road, the farther away from my family I get. When I think of my mother, I turn back.” Taken together, these lyrics express the Mosuo people’s love of family and especially, their love of their mothers.

Conclusion

In addition to the songs introduced above, many other types of Mosuo folk songs exist. And because Mosuo villages are scattered throughout the region, folk songs in different places show great differences in mode, melodic style, and other aspects. I am in the process of undertaking massive compiling, collecting and collating efforts (cf. Yang and Peng 2022). In the future, I want to compile teaching materials and better promote them on local campuses. I will pour my maximum strength into efforts to carry forward the outstanding traditional song and dance culture of the Mosuo people, while also sharing the beautiful practices with people throughout the world.

About the Author

Yang Lifen, born in 1974, is a Mosuo woman who graduated from the Yunnan Art Institute in Kunming, China in 1998. She is now an associate professor of vocal music in Lijiang Normal College, where she has been recognized as a ‘backbone’ (*gugan*) or key teacher, and is a director of the Lijiang Matrilineal Culture Research Association (International). She is mainly engaged in music teaching and ethnic music culture research. She has created a new course dedicated to Naxi and Mosuo song and dance and participates in efforts to incorporate more ethnicity related content in the university curriculum. She has received numerous awards in vocal performance and teaching competitions, and was awarded the title of ‘Lijiang Image Ambassador.’ In 2010, she published a monograph, whose translated title is *Wounded Silence: Cultural Research Phenomenon in the Eyes of a Mosuo Woman*.

About the Translator and Editor

Tami Blumenfield is an anthropologist focused on the dynamics of community change and the ethics of creating and archiving knowledge. She is also a documentary filmmaker, cultural translator and program evaluator with expertise in China, the United States, France and Israel, fluent in several Chinese dialects and French. She is Kuige Scholar at Yunnan University, Adjunct Research Assistant Professor at the University of New Mexico Anthropology Department, and principal of Blumenfield Cultural Services, LLC. She holds a

Sociocultural Anthropology PhD from the University of Washington and an MLIS from the University of South Carolina.

Acknowledgments

The author and translator express gratitude to their families, who have supported their efforts to safeguard and promote cultural heritage in many forms, and their institutions, which have provided platforms for doing so. We also thank members of Yongning villages who have welcomed us into their homes and shared their songs, dances, music and stories with us, not to mention inviting us for tea, meals and homemade snacks. The author gratefully acknowledges funding from the Lijiang Philosophy and Social Science Institute for the project, 'Research on Lugu Lake Mosuo Folk Song and Dance,' and funding from the Lijiang Shifan Gaodeng Zhuanke Xuexiao for the pedagogical reform project, 'Vocal Performance.' We express our sincere thanks to the *Matrix* editorial team for their patient support of our work and their support of matrilineal expression.

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* Interested readers are invited to refer to the Chinese version of this article for an appendix entitled *Mosuo Ge Yao / Mosuo Ballad*, one of the composition-medleys created for the university students and discussed in this article.

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摩梭传统歌舞进大学校园

中国云南丽江师范高等专科学校 杨丽芬（年者小玛）

提要

本文讨论了作者如何把摩梭人的民歌和神话故事改编成大型舞蹈和音乐表演，以便与中国主流观众和当地学生分享。作为一个摩梭人，作者搜集了民歌，抄录了歌词，为它们谱写了旋律，并把它们翻译成中文。 文章还讨论了作者带领其学生制作的大型公共表演作品，作品中有着有摩梭特色服饰、用摩梭语和汉语演唱的歌曲，以及精心编排的动作和舞蹈。 这些表演受到了极大的欢迎，并展示了将摩梭文化创作成适合主流社会的作品的能力。 有的作品是在当地演出，也有的在省级表演并获奖。这些作品不仅将母系社会的民歌传承下来，同时还向具有其他不同亲属制度的观众呈现了一种母系文化的气质。 文章介绍了各种摩梭歌曲的本意和寓意，并讨论了不同的舞蹈和歌唱表演形式。

关键词：文化传承； 摩梭音乐； 摩梭语歌曲； 非物质文化遗产； 母系文化

Abstract

This article discusses the author's efforts to tell the story of Mosuo matricultures and myths by adapting original Mosuo songs and dances into versions that can be shared with mainstream Chinese audiences and local students. The author, a Mosuo person, has collected folk songs, transcribed their lyrics, notated their melodies, and translated them into Chinese. The article also discusses large-scale public performance pieces featuring the

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author's students that involve stylized Mosuo clothing, singing in both Narua (Mosuo) and Chinese languages, and tightly choreographed movements and dancing. These performances were exceptionally well received, and demonstrated the possibility of presenting artistic creations based on Mosuo heritage to the general public. Some of the performances were at the local level, while some have been presented at and won awards at the provincial level. Not only do they preserve folk songs of a matrilineal culture, these efforts also present a matrilineal ethos to Chinese audiences with very different kinship systems. The article presents various Mosuo songs, including their translated meanings, and discusses different dance and singing performances.

Keywords: cultural transmission; Mosuo music; Narua songs; intangible cultural heritage; matrilineal culture

Résumé

Ce texte présente les efforts de l'auteure pour raconter l'histoire des mythes et de la matriculture des Mosuos, en adaptant des chants et des dances traditionnelles de façon à pouvoir les partager avec le grand public chinois et les étudiants de la région. L'auteure, une personne mosuo, a recueilli des chants folkloriques locaux, a transcrit leurs lyriques et leur mélodies, et les a traduits en langue chinoise. Elle discute ici les prestations publiques à grande échelle mettant en vedette ces étudiants, avec au programme des costumes mosuos stylisés, des chants en Naru et en Mosul, des dances et des mouvements chorégraphiés précis. Ces spectacles ont été exceptionnellement bien reçus, et ont démontrés la possibilité de présenter au grand public des créations artistiques basées sur l'héritage mosuo. Quelques-uns des spectacles furent présenté au niveau local, pendant que d'autres sont été présentés au niveau provincial où ils se sont mérité des prix. Non seulement, permettent-ils de préserver les chants folkloriques d'une culture matrilinéaire, mais ils démontrent l'ethos matrilinéaire aux audiences chinoises habituées à des systèmes de parenté très différents. Ce texte inclut plusieurs chants mosuos, avec leur traduction en Anglais, est une discussion des prestations dansées et chantées. En conclusion, l'auteure commente les expériences et les défis rencontrés dans l'enseignement des chants et danses folkloriques en milieu universitaire.

Mots-clés : transmission culturelle, musique Mosuo, chansons de Narua, patrimoine culturel immatériel; culture matrilinéaire

我是出生在中国云南丽江宁蒗县泸沽湖的摩梭人，我是一名丽江师范高等专科学校的音乐老师。主要从事音乐教育教学工作。作为为数不多的摩梭大学老师，我负有传承和传播本土文化的特特殊使命。中国摩梭人优秀传统歌舞文化由摩梭人世世代代在长期的社会实践中创造并积淀起来的，它是摩梭人宝贵的精神遗产，也是摩梭人特有的思维方式的精神体现。中华各民族优秀传统文化的整体性、人伦性和传承性，它包含丰富的思想，是今天中国特色社会主义新的价值体系和文化体系建立和建设的必不可少的资源，是加强当代大学生思想道德建设的宝贵资源，因此，在高校开展人文科学教育。当代大学生对中华优秀传统文化的传承与弘扬是当代历史时代的重大课题，也是一个民族自立自强的长远发展规划。这就要求高校的教师勇于探索，敢于创新，切实改进当代大学生的思想政治教育工作的思路、模式、方法和载体。为努力营造大学生传承与弘扬中华民族优秀的传统文化的良好氛围，丽江师专歌舞表演专业开设了《中国民族民间舞》《云南民族民间舞》《云南民歌演唱》《云南代表性歌舞》《非遗歌舞》《丽江民族民间歌舞》等课程。人才培养方案中体现在自由民族、活泼开放、和谐创新的环境中哺育一代又一代高素质、方向坚定的国家建设者和接班人。

在摩梭音乐的熏陶下长大

我是一个土生土长的摩梭人，从小在摩梭村子里长大，我对摩梭民俗摩梭歌舞都是非常熟悉和了解。一直以来都很热爱自己的本土文化，要把摩梭的传统歌舞引入校园是我最开心的事，于是我主动承当了《非遗歌舞》《丽江民族民间歌舞》《云南民歌演唱》等课程的负责，认真书写教学大纲，把很多本土的歌舞融入教学中，虽然说这些课程才开始，但我很乐意做这件事，希望通过教学让更多的人了解丽江少数民族歌舞，我努力建设这些课程，希望这些课程能成为丽江本土高校的特色课程。也是传播和传承文化的一种更好的途径。

从小生活在摩梭村子，感受我的母系大家庭文化，我姓母亲的家姓，我的妈妈家姓“年者”所以我叫‘年者小玛’。‘年者’是我的姓，小玛是我的名字“金若独玛”的简称。因为家里大姐叫“旦史独玛”、二姐叫“松娜独玛”、三姐叫“永珍独玛”，四姐妹都有“独玛”，我是最小所以大家叫我“小独玛”简称“小玛”。我上小学的时候我的哥哥给我起了一个汉族名字‘杨丽芬’，我上学就用这个名字，所以我的身份证上写的是我的汉族名字“杨丽芬”。很多摩梭人都认识“年者小玛”但不知道“杨丽芬”。讲个笑话，93 年我在云南民族村认识的一个朋友拿着我的照片去我家，告诉我妈妈说“你的女儿杨丽芬是我的朋友”。我妈妈说：“哪个杨丽芬？我不认识....”因为我妈妈不知道我的汉族名字。看了我的照片她才知道她的小女儿原来叫‘杨丽芬’哈哈.....

从小我长在摩梭家庭里，一个妈妈生下来的孩子永远生活在一起。家里几个姐妹养育的孩子都共同生活在一个屋檐下。我们都是兄弟姐妹相称。家里所有与妈妈同辈的女性长辈都统称“阿妈”。对我们摩梭人来说名字就仅仅是一个符号，没有要求必须跟随母亲或父亲的姓氏。当有人问起你时，你首先要告诉你是哪个家屋里的人，把家屋的姓氏告诉别人。摩梭人一般不会问“你叫什么名字？”而会问“农尔尼尔尼？或者农尔尼尔比古？”“尔”哪一个族群或者哪一个家族的意思。翻译过来：你是哪一家的？你家家屋姓什么？举个例子，如果有人问我的名字，我就会回答：我是年者家的小玛。所以先把家屋名字放前面再加你个人的名字。

“会说话就会唱歌，会走路就会跳舞”: 走进艺术学院的遥远路

摩梭人有一句话说“会说话就会唱歌，会走路就会跳舞”。这句话有点也不假。在摩梭地方你很难遇到五音不全的人。我会说话的时候就会唱摩梭歌，会走路的时候就会跳摩梭舞。我们 7 个兄弟姐妹，个个都能歌善舞，先是大哥差点被省歌舞团招去当歌唱演员。我的三姐是舞蹈演员，十三岁就被县里的文工团招去当舞蹈演员。我的二姐是村里有名的歌唱家。外号“年者宋祖英”（宋祖英是中国著名的女高音歌唱家），我的三哥村里外号“年者阎维

文”（阎维文是中国著名的男高音歌唱家）。大姐和三姐的歌声也很美。我从小就是村里的小歌手，我还不会说汉语就会唱中国歌剧《洪湖赤卫队》里的歌曲《看天下劳苦人民都解放》。小学三年级就代表学校去永宁镇小学比赛，我还记得当时唱《每当我走过老师的窗前》。小学、初中、高中都是班里的文艺委员。上初中的时候，在永宁中学，每周三就会放广场电影。学生和附近村里的村民们一起看电影。每次放映前放映师傅都会先让我和几个同学轮流唱歌。学校附近村里的人都特别爱听我唱歌。平时我住校，吃住都在学校。周三放电影，不上晚自习，我们就回家吃晚饭。有一次，我从家回学校，正走在学校附近，我前面的几个大姐姐快步走着，其中一个大姐说“我们走快点，我听见年者小玛都已经在唱歌了”。看来我小时候还是摩梭村的小明星哈哈.....

从小爱唱歌，但是从来没有想过自己有一天会以唱歌作为职业。我考云南艺术学院也是一个偶然的机会。高中毕业前的一个晚自习，我的班主任来守晚自习，他聊着哪些同学可以考什么学校，突然他说“杨丽芬，你声音怎么好，怎么没有想过考艺术学院？再过两三天云南艺术学院就要招考了”。我还是头一次听说可以考艺术学院。我回去就跟我在县城工作的大哥和三姐随便一说。三姐很高兴，因为三姐是歌舞团的人，她喜欢唱歌跳舞，她说她可以带我去，两姐妹买了火车票就上昆明。到了考试的地方，我唱的是摩梭‘成人礼’的民歌，没有歌谱，更不知道自己唱什么调。我也没有见过钢琴，也不懂视唱练耳。就凭着一副好嗓子，去考云南艺术学院。第一年因为钢琴、乐理都不知道，没有考上，高中毕业去到到云南民族村打工，我一边打工一边找艺术学院的老师上声乐、钢琴、视唱练耳课程，94 年我考进了云南艺术学院音乐教育系。开始了我的音乐梦。

我在学校学美声唱法，我是少数民族，可是在学校一直唱舒伯特的《摇篮曲》，唱意大利歌曲《为艺术为爱情》《西班牙女郎》《阿里路亚》《我亲爱的爸爸》等的外国作品。老师还要求唱意大利语。后来摩梭民歌也被我唱成美声。学了美声唱法，我唱摩梭民歌非常难听。我很郁闷，有一段时间我都不

会唱歌了。经过了很长时间的不自然歌唱状态，直到我回来参加工作，我都不喜欢自己的声音。后来我一边教学一边琢磨歌唱的正确方法。发现其实歌唱应该是一个自然的声音。我觉得最自然的发声就是就科学的歌唱方法。现在我教学生都用自然的歌唱方法。从不要求学生刻意唱成美声或者民族，用自己最舒服的身体状态歌唱就是正确的。我经常会让学生感知自己歌唱时的肌体感受，歌唱中如果你的肌体非常放松、非常自然那这个歌唱状态是正确的，如果歌唱中你身体的哪怕一块肌肉很不舒服，那这个歌唱方法肯定是错误的。这是我的歌唱理念。接受新的歌唱方式，让我经历了歌唱从自然---不自然---自然。在我的歌唱经历中，小时候唱摩梭民歌，听摩梭民歌是最幸福的事。从小妈妈哼唱的摇篮曲就是摩梭传统民歌。听妈妈讲格姆女神的故事，唱格姆女神的颂歌。摩梭母系文化在我身上刻着深深的烙印。我爱我的摩梭大家庭，我爱我的摩梭文化，更爱我的摩梭民歌。

村落的歌曲进入大学课程

本着地方高校传承发扬传统文化的使命。我一直想着把本土的特色歌舞引入大学校园。恰逢学校提倡建设特色课程，于是我尝试着把一些传统的本土民族歌舞融入到教学中。我是歌舞表演专业负责人，在编写歌舞表演专业人才培养方案的过程中，我做了大量的调研。和同事们一起讨论，设置了《丽江民族民间歌舞》《云南民歌演唱》《非遗歌舞传习》等特色课程。我亲自编写教学大纲，还亲自负责这些课程的教学工作。一方面为地方高校传承与发展传统中华文化做努力。一方面也是传承丽江各民族的歌舞文化。我很乐意做这件事。虽然课程建设才刚刚开始，还没有取得好的教学效果，但通过教学，我发现学生对这样的课程很感兴趣。我愿意做更多的研究和推广。

目前已经在校园推广的最具有特色的作品是摩梭人的“阿妈瓜鲁”，（附件 1）这个作品主要是结合摩梭传统的母系文化，把摇篮曲、成人礼歌、摩梭打跳歌曲、摩梭情歌等传统的摩梭歌曲，通过歌曲串烧的形式，借助现代的音乐制作编写出来的。歌曲创作背景是一个摩梭女人成长的一生。女儿出

世，阿妈唱着摇篮曲；女儿长大成人，举行摩梭 13 岁的成人礼仪式，歌唱成人礼的歌；举行成人礼仪式后，正式加入社交场所，穿上漂亮的摩梭服饰，参加篝火晚会等社交场所，自由恋爱，唱走婚歌，最后成为母亲这样的一条线索来进行创作的。

作品的名称叫《阿妈瓜鲁》，“瓜鲁”摩梭语指“罐子”也可以译为“宝贝”。“阿妈瓜鲁”意：妈妈的宝贝。摩梭传统文化“重女不轻男”，但事实上家里生个女孩是最开心的事。《阿妈瓜鲁》这个作品以摩梭原生态歌曲元素进行改编，主要以女声小合唱的形式呈现。演唱者用摩梭语进行演唱。《阿妈瓜鲁》是以摩梭原生态歌曲元素进行改编的作品。以摩梭摇篮曲《阿妈瓜鲁》（译：阿妈宝贝）、摩梭成人礼歌《木若来叠昙吉则》（译：女儿长大成人）、摩梭打跳舞曲《阿杜哦尔来求求》（译：朋友伙伴在一起）、摩梭古歌《啊哈吧啦》（译：啊哈吧啦是一句叹词没有具体意思）等四首摩梭人原生态的摩梭歌曲元素加入二部和声。是一曲具有原生态韵味又融入现代理念的作品。我是谁？我从哪里来？我到哪里去？是一个哲学之问，也是人间的天问，摩梭人也有自己的生命之问，这就是：生命的降生、成长的喜悦，生命的辉煌。

歌曲的第一篇章描述的是一个善良的摩梭阿妈怀抱着孩子，唱着摇篮曲的情景。第二个篇章，描述女儿成长，举行了摩梭人传统的 13 岁成人礼，歌曲演绎女儿长大阿妈喜悦的心情。第三个篇章，描述女儿长大，篝火晚会上和小伙伴们一起在篝火旁欢乐的歌唱舞蹈，唱着摩梭古老的歌谣《啊哈吧啦》，跳着摩梭人欢快的锅庄舞。这个作品曾在 2020 年参加“云南本土歌曲创作演唱大赛”获优秀奖。

作品翻译：

第一篇章《阿妈瓜鲁》歌词大意:阿妈的宝贝呀，你是阿妈的乖宝宝，阿妈的宝贝呀！你要健康快乐地成长！

第二篇章《木若来叠昙吉》歌词大意:美丽的泸沽湖迎来了朝阳，格姆女

神披上了吉祥的朝霞，善良的摩梭阿妈呀，为何这样高兴，是因为女儿长大成人。

第三篇章《阿柱哦尔来求求》歌词大意：来呀来呀来打跳，跳到天亮才回去，朋友伙伴在一起，就像生在花丛中。

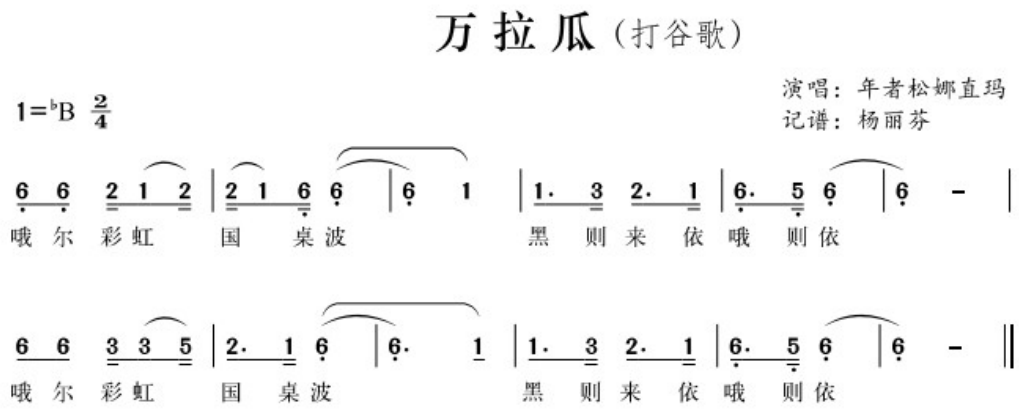
第四篇章《啊哈吧啦》：啊哈吧啦是摩梭民歌的一个衬词没有具体意思。摩梭人把摩梭民歌统称“啊哈吧啦”。一般作为摩梭民歌的起调。

《阿妈瓜鲁》完全在摩梭传统歌曲的基础上创编的作品，它仅仅只是摩梭传统歌舞的一个部分。摩梭传统的民歌种类很多，有劳动歌、习俗歌、儿歌、山歌、小调等等。歌曲的最大特点是歌词的即兴创作。所以说会唱摩梭民歌的人必须还有聪明才智，要不然你还真不会唱摩梭民歌。

关于摩梭民歌的即兴创作，我讲一个小时候听说的故事。村子里有一个很会唱歌的摩梭大叔。他根据每个人的个性编说唱，也就是摩梭 rap。故事讲的是这个大叔年轻的时候跟村里的一个摩梭女走婚，后来他又喜欢上一个邻村的女孩，他的走婚对象知道这个事情，非常气愤，就召集她的女同伴们，聚在一起商量怎么对付这个第三者，于是大叔就编了一个 rap,取笑她们的聚会，用说唱的形式，描写当时每个人的行为举止，把人物性格描绘得淋漓尽致。歌词幽默风趣，听了令人啼笑皆非。从中也体现了这位歌者的

幽默风趣与智慧。

摩梭人还有自己的劳动歌曲，其中最最著名的是这首《万拉挂》（译：打谷歌）就是摩梭人打谷子的时候所唱的歌曲。描写摩梭人在生厂劳动的时候一种自娱自乐的劳动场面。歌词比较诙谐幽默。相互打趣的歌。这跟摩梭人平时爱开玩笑的习惯有关。歌词依然是即兴创编。



视频一：*Rehearsing Dancing for Mosuo Songs at the University in Lijiang* (15 secs): https://youtu.be/E91hTc9hNm8

视频二：*Mosuo Music at the University: Lijiang 2019* (16 secs): https://youtu.be/ldhRDn41vjM

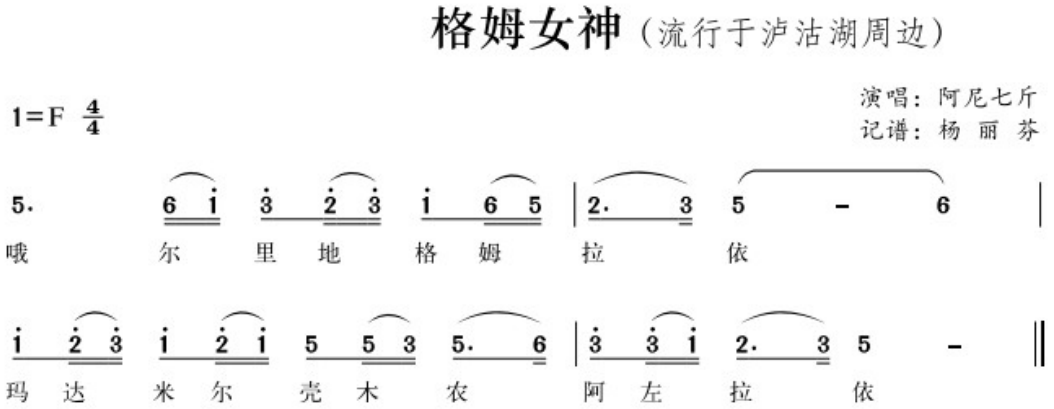
视频三：*Ahabala Song Medley Performed for the Yunnan Bentu Creative Song Competition* (1m57s): https://youtu.be/-bWGqD5lKmw

视频四：*Three Song New Years' Medley of Mosuo Music: 2019* (4m30s): https://youtu.be/fxZvvjD4OPo

摩梭民歌的种类和特点

习俗歌，比如《格姆女神颂》，歌词一问一答，适合对唱，这首歌曲主要跟摩梭的一个神话传说故事有关，在永宁的东面有一座山，从永宁镇看过去，它就像一只卧着的狮子，摩梭人称狮子山，因为摩梭流传有一个美

丽的神话故事，传说狮子山下的摩梭村子里，有一位非常漂亮的摩梭女孩，她勤劳、美丽、善良。她可以织出天上的彩虹。传说农历七月的时候，天神总是暴雨、冰雹破坏永宁的庄稼牲畜，传说在农历七月二十五这天，天神抓走村庄里的牛羊和格姆姑娘，整个永宁坝的摩梭人一起呐喊，天神慌乱中放了格姆姑娘，格姆姑娘跌落在狮子山上，化作了格姆女神，传说善良的格姆女神，她经常骑着白马巡游摩梭人居住的村庄，保佑这一带的人畜兴旺，风调雨顺，五谷丰登，而且还赐予摩梭女性貌美，婚姻幸福，子孙繁衍。因此，每年农历七月二十五日是摩梭人传统的转山节，大家聚在格姆山下，烧香祈福，祈求女神保佑，来年风调雨顺。于是摩梭人有了歌颂格姆女神的歌《噢尔里地格姆》。翻译过来“我们的格姆女神”或者《格姆女神颂》。



后来狮子山成为当地摩梭人顶礼膜拜的女神山。在其南麓松林中，还建有神庙，庙内墙壁上绘有骑鹿的格姆女神画像。自古每年农历七月二十五日，这里都要举行盛大的转山活动，摩梭语称之为"格姆瓜"，意为"转女山"。从祭女神的活动及其神话传说中，可以窥见妇女在摩梭人社会生活中的重要地位。其中《格姆女神颂》就是用一问一答的方式，歌唱格姆女神的妆容。歌词大意是：

问：我们美丽的格姆女神她用什么做头饰？

答：我们美丽的格姆女神，她用白云做头饰。

问：我们美丽的格姆女神，用什么做衣裳？

答：我们美丽的格姆女神，她用碧绿的泸沽湖做衣裳。

问：我们美丽的格姆女神，她用什么做坐垫?

答：我们美丽的格姆女神，物产丰富的永宁坝是她的坐垫。

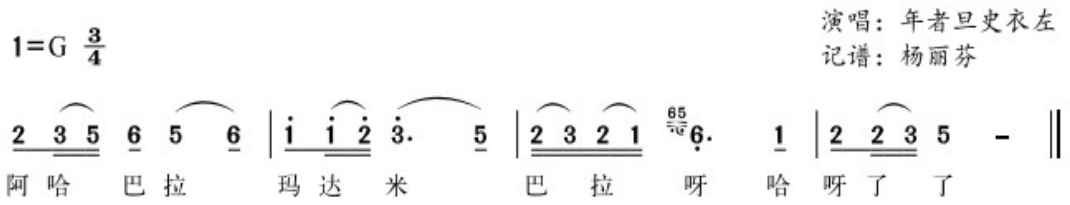
摩梭儿歌，《阿妈瓜鲁》，没有具体的歌词，就是哼唱，有时候也有词，一样歌词还是即兴创作。歌词大意：阿妈宝宝呀，宝宝乖乖呀等这样的反复哼唱。歌词里只有阿妈，因为摩梭人走婚，孩子在妈妈的家里抚养长大，抚养孩子的是孩子妈妈和孩子妈妈的兄弟姐妹。

摩梭山歌也可以说是小调，它的种类很多，有表达爱情的、有表达亲情的、有表达思念的。如表达爱情的歌：如果你喜欢一个人，你可以唱“金花和银花开在一起，金鸟和银鸟在不在一个碗里喝水？”如果对方也愿意，就会回答“金花和银花都开在一起，金鸟和银鸟当然可以用一个碗喝水。”如果不愿意，就回答“我不是这一方人，只是经过这里。”这是男女青年恋爱场所相互试探对方是否对自己中意的歌。

另外，表现对爱情坚贞不移的歌，“搭好木桥来等你，如果木桥坏了，我会搭着石桥等你来”。表达摩梭人的走婚是建立在感情的基础上。可以海枯石烂。

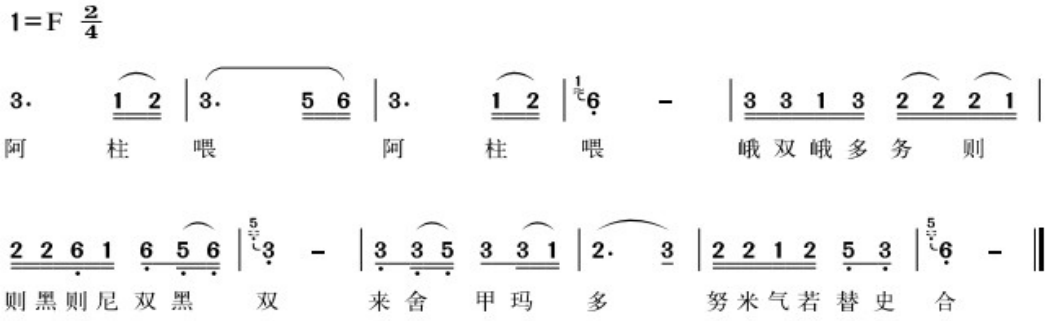
摩梭人平时说话会非常客气，碍于面子。摩梭人的面子非常重要，所谓的面子文化，不会轻易拒绝或者表达自己的情感。因此说话总是拐弯抹角。骂人也是很委婉，比如遇到你不中意或者人品不好的人，你也只能婉转地说，不能太直接，比如遇到风流不负责任的男孩，女孩会唱“挺拔的白杨树，可惜树干里被虫蛀了”意思你容貌英俊，只可惜人品不怎么样。比如遇到朝三暮四的女孩，就唱“山上的竹子婀娜多姿，可惜只能编装粪撮”。先歌唱她容貌美丽动人，可惜她是一个不懂得自重的人。

阿哈巴拉1

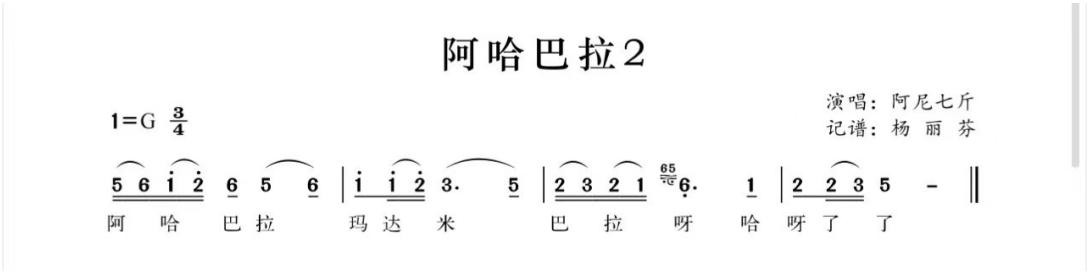


摩梭表达爱情的歌曲，其中有一首特别有名，叫《阿柱喂》。“阿柱”在摩梭语里是朋友的意思。但一般在摩梭地方很少说这个词，因为摩梭人的害羞文化里，家里的哥哥弟弟和姐姐妹妹在一起一般不说这个词，这个词一般是指走婚对象。歌词是这样的“阿柱喂，阿柱，天上的飞鸟越飞越高，找也找不见你，我的心都碎了。”表达摩梭人崇尚自由恋爱。感情是维持两个人婚姻的重要因素，与金钱地位毫无关系。感情好在一起，没有的感情就分开，从小孩子有女方抚养，由舅舅抚养，舅舅承当这爸爸的责任。在女方家庭长大，即使父母分开了对孩子也没有任何影响。摩梭人婚姻自由、恋爱自由。

阿 柱 喂（走婚情歌）



表达亲情友情的歌，摩梭民歌里，歌唱妈妈的特别多。一个调，可以配多种情绪的歌词。其中歌唱妈妈的特别多。摩梭人家庭是母系家庭，摩梭人的文化里有很多崇母文化的文化符号。歌曲里也一样，歌唱妈妈的歌多如牛毛。比如一个曲调可以配不同情绪的歌词。比如这个旋律：



第一种填词，歌颂妈妈的：直古多色，直罗九，鸟妈你哼多妈塔。（译：翻过了几座山，走过了几条河，没有遇见像我妈妈这样善良的人）；

第二种填词，表达对逝去母亲的思念：吸纳来历单多塔，阿妈来历多马塔。（译：湖水都可以见到底，我却看不到我的妈妈了）。

第三种表达女儿不愿意出嫁的词：阿妈喜啦阿妈占，吗喜侬占塔吗以。（译：妈妈养育我，我伺候妈妈，我不愿意去伺候没有养育过我的人）。

第四种填表现喜悦心情的：啊哈吧啦吃所卓，纳若纳姆斑斑尼。（译：啊哈吧啦这首歌，是我们摩梭女儿心中盛开的幸福花）

比如：“荣华富贵我不想，我只想着我的妈妈要长命百岁”表达摩梭儿女心中，只要妈妈活着就是最幸福的事。“养育我的阿妈这个家，不能因为贫穷而抛弃”表达摩梭大家庭，要相互扶持相互帮助，不分你我。“我在外过得很幸福，只怕我养育我的阿妈想念我”“路越走越远，可是想到阿妈我回头了”这些歌词表达摩梭人恋家、恋母的情结。

收集摩梭歌曲、弘扬摩梭文化、把摩梭人的非物质文化遗产带上世界

除了以上介绍的摩梭民歌，摩梭民歌的种类很多，由于居住地分布不同，各地的摩梭民歌在调式等方面有很大的差异。我正在做大量的收集和整理。将来想编写成教材，更好地在地方校园推广。为弘扬摩梭优秀传统歌舞文化

尽自己最大的力量。

作者简介

杨丽芬，女，1974 年 11 月出生，摩梭人，1998 年毕业于云南艺术学院，现任丽江师范高等专科学校艺术学院声乐副教授,丽江师专骨干教师，丽江（国际）母系文化研究学会理事。主要从事民族文化研究和教学以及音乐教学工作。曾多次在声乐、教学比赛中获奖，荣获丽江形象大使称号。研究成果发表于国内外学术刊物、论文集，主持市厅级《泸沽湖摩梭人民间歌舞研究》项目，主持丽江师专《声乐演唱》重点课程、金课项目。2010 年出版个人专著《受伤的沉默者----一个摩梭女人眼中的文化研究现象》。

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Michif Women 'Making Real' with the Roogaroo

MARGARET KRESS, PhD

Background

Legendary folklore and mythology often posit shapeshifters as humans who naturally transform into something divine, or into a demonic form or shape, through a possibility of spiritual intercession or sorcery and, perhaps, even through a process of physical human adeptness. We see stories of Indigenous cosmology highlighting deities and natural phenomena, and some of notable mythology portraying characters reflecting human to animistic transformation. Often these mesmeric storylines are laced with lessons of morality based on human actions and re-actions mirroring stances of righteousness or deviance, and showing the subsequent emotive conditions bringing the human (and those near) to outcomes rife with humiliation, shame, sorrow, and on occasion, jubilation, healing and harmony (Barkwell, Acco Carriére & Rozyk, ND). Sometimes, and paradoxically, a super human life incident may lead to a form of enlightenment, or even fatalism; in a sense, it may give another human being the sanction to live or to die (Kachuba, 2019). Within our earthly realm, visual representations of artifacts, hieroglyphs, petroglyphs, celestial stone formations, and other symbolic marks and signs of Nature may possibly show the veracity of shapeshifters, deities and spirits found here on Earth (Bruchac, 2014).

Moreover, cosmographies holding oral knowledges of teachings often come in a 'passing forward' from a family relation or noted clan member to those still learning; these

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repositories of orality are usually filled with ancestral messages embedded within matricultural knowledges, Indigenous languages, and cultural protocols and ceremonies of a kinship or nation (Bruchac, 2014; Ferguson, 2001). Forms of governance respecting natural law within Indigenous cosmologies as applied to all living beings, all relationality, are reflective of a spiritual truth-telling within the underworld, upon the earth, and in the skies (McAdam, 2015). The foundations of Indigenous cosmologies are mutually protected modes of knowing shared by Indigenous peoples globally (Pearce, 2012). Although the principles of mythology are heavily rooted within cosmology, there has always been variance among stories, and plenty of evidence of those which show anomalies between the foundations of cosmology and Indigenous knowing, and other worldly teachings based on folklore (Richardson, 2022). Indigenous ancestral knowings have connections with ethos and spiritual beliefs, cultural ceremony, and Nature herself. Many have central figures leading the way including those, for example, of the Inuit, the Haida, the Hopi, and the Miwok, where *Sedna* (Mother of the Sea), *Raven*, *Tawa* (Sun Spirt) and *Coyote* are integral to their creation stories and the evolution of their nations (Tchana, 2006; Wardle, 1990).

Shape Shifters All Around

Historically, witches, wizards, and even fairies dominated Celtic, Scottish and old English tradition and were often noted as shapeshifters (Briggs, 1976). Similarly, in other parts of the world, akin humans took on animistic formations of creatures found in the skies, upon the earth, and within the seas: ravens, swans, serpents or snakes, dolphins, seals, bears, foxes, wolves, jaguars, and more are presented in these ancient stories. Although global in nature, the stories of those who transform are somewhat scattered and perhaps unfamiliar to many Westerners. Each of these beings is seemingly known to have the capacity to shape shift or to make a bodily change into another form and, when choosing, are able to resort back to human form or other physicality. Plants are included within the profiles of those who shape shift, change, hide, or intervene and they too may play a part in influencing the reality of humans in their realm (Richardson, 2022; Richardson in Kress, 2022). Those known as leviathans, alchemists, ghouls, and the *yee naaldlooshii* or the skinwalkers are all a part of a ‘clan’ which elevates the notion of shapeshifter to one who transforms (Lamb, R., 2022; Uehlinger, 1999). This reality is often connected to biblical Christian beliefs and the notion of sorcery and sinfulness. An example found in Trinidadian and Tobago folklore is that of the Liaghaoo; notably, this shapeshifter often keeps the company of African witch doctors. Comparable stories have been found among those from Haiti where persons who negate the mores of Catholicism and engage in religious deviance are delivered a powerful lesson by the Loup Garou (werewolf) (Besson, 2017). Closer to home, the Loup Garou’s locality to Turtle Island finds it communing in places

where French Canadian Catholics live, primarily in the province of Quebec. The sibling of Loup Garou, best known as the Rougarou, finds its place among the Métisse, Métis, or Michif in the more western areas of Canada. Moreover, we see the story of the Roogaroo resonate among the Cajun French in the southern Bayou of Louisiana in locations where the many Métisse, mixed French Canadiens, or French-speaking Acadians travelled via the fur trade routes of the 1700s (Foxcurran, Bouchard, Malette, 2016). Stories associated with these shapeshifters are found to teach critical lessons to those around them, and although some are asserted to be folklore, there are creatives among us who say the noted orality of these stories provides us with another realm of understanding (Beaucage, 2023). For some peoples, these stories are certainly more than folklore—and for Indigenous peoples, they may move beyond notions of mythology to those of realism. Here these shapeshifters exist as entities within a cosmic metaphysical reality which encompasses multiple levels of Indigenous knowing, being and doing. Importantly, within this understanding of cosmology we know that for

> most indigenous cultures … the soul does not die but rather transmigrates from human to animal or plant or higher spirit forms, and because the soul is capable of living in natural entities such as rivers, mountains, the earth, etc., both the animate and the inanimate are revered (Nassau,1904b in Akoto & Piésold, 2008, p.1).

Michif Women Making It Real

Central to this notion of shapeshifter are those who tell the stories of these beings and their aliveness. Most notably in times past, many Indigenous women and men such as the *boté* (Crow) and the *winkte* (Lakota) were warriors, sages, and healers within their communities (History of Round Table, 2019). Those holding these roles were responsible for the protection of other members and for keeping ceremonies, medicines, healing traditions, and children safe. Much within these ancient ceremonies endured the severity of colonialism; however, some significant teachings and practices were retained and are made alive through the passing down of oral knowledges (Bruchac, 2014). Knowledges within a cosmology of a peoples' nationhood embody space and time and within these vortexes they encompass and are reflective of spiritual influence, ancestral divinity, and natural law (McAdam, 2015). Each of these entities are integral features in the passing down of cultural practices and traditional lessons governing human ethos, mores, behaviors and values, as well as encounters, dealings, and clashes with other Indigenous nations and settlers. Today the stories of the Rougarou are primarily used as teachings and are kept alive by elder keepers, oral historians, linguists, and ceremonial healers through

blood memory and the re-coding of the passing down (Beaucage, 2023; Flammand, 2023; Richardson, 2022; Ziarkowska, 2015).

In a similar vein, Métis oral tradition ensures Indigenous spirituality is kept alive through the stories of the ancestors and through, for example, the influences of culture, ceremonies, and traditions. These include, most notably among the Algonquian speaking peoples, those of the Cree, Ojibway, Saulteaux, and even the Crow, which interfaced with the practices of spirituality among the Michif (Bruchac, 2014; Foxcurran et al, 2016; Barkwell, Dorion. & Hourie, 2006). This praxis of a melding or a mixing of Cree spirituality with, for example, a Roman Catholic religious influence brought about a finely-tuned adoption of both Catholic religion and Indigenous spirituality which saw Michif prayers being said in and outside of churches, during masses, and in the homes of the Catholic Métis (Richardson, 2022), while in many families traditional spiritual Cree practices continued, albeit for some behind closed doors (Richardson, 2022; Flammand, 2023).

For these Michif, the preservation of the soul and sanctity of life was foremost and the elevation of spirit happenings integral to the lives of themselves and their kin was and, in some cases today, continues to be central to life itself (Beaucage, 2023; Richardson, 2022). Family was sacred and foremost in the minds and hearts of these Michif. Adherence to moral conduct and principled living as directed by their ancestors was never far from their minds and its influence impacted what transpired as *joie de vivre* or *la zhway* within the human condition. Those who openly shared the stories that follow or who found a coming out after the underground years of Métis hiding attest to Michif survival and reclamation of language and culture (Flammand, 2022). For Indigenous peoples globally, higher directives through spirit and the power of natural laws were entwined within families; some believed that “ancestors become spiritual beings with the power to affect the fortune of the living for good or bad” (Nassau 1904a, in Akoto and Piésold, 2008, p.1). These realities embedded themselves within a Michif cosmology and are collectively noted in today’s recalling of the trickster characters, shapeshifters, and the Roogaroo (Barkwell, Dorion & Hourie, 2006; Barkwell, Acco Carriére & Rozyk, ND).

Michif women and men have long told spirit-driven stories about their ancestors, their teachings, their religious practices, and, of course, the coming of Rougarou (Campbell, 2010; Letourneau, 2006). Within the story of the Rougarou a “syncretistic variation of the French-Canadian loup garou and the Cree shapeshifter [develops into a] person whom in some way has offended the Creator or has been possessed by evil spirits.” (Barkwell, Acco Carriére & Rozyk, ND, p. 10) Further, if you were the one to see one of these beings, you were told to keep secret the identity or you may, in fact, become a Rougarou yourself. In my teachings, those who see this shapeshifter may know the embodied positionality of that trickster and although they may not divulge that knowing, a good number who share

this collective story concur that this human transformer brings with it both a harsh lesson and an opportunity for the learner to do better. Currently and in very public ways, the Michif have resurged in the telling of these ancestral stories, those of creation and mythology, others of legends and fable, and certainly some of realism. In this public reclaiming of the Roogaroo, I believe the most prevalent of these storytellers, writers, filmmakers, musicians, and artisans to be those carrying a feminine mystique. Michif women and Two-Spirit Métis are leading among those who seek to honour the memory of their ancestors in this way!

In Maria Campbell's depiction of the Rougarou, old time tradition and translation helps her distinguish her "Rou Garous" in *The Road Allowance Peoples* (2010). It is through her voice of the bush Metis that we learn about the ancestors and the Rou Garous as a shapeshifter:

> My ole Grafawder he could turn hisself into a bear. An I knowed dis ole woman when I was a boy dat one he turned hisself into a kiyute. Bet dey do dat to doctor peoples dat was sick. Dese Rou Garous dey was different. Dey was bad tings from dah dark side of dah eart. (Campbell, 2010, 34, 35).

In this story, Campbell's words are buoyed up by striking visual images of the shapeshifter offered by painter Sherry Farrell Racette. Both the teller and the artist provide details which sanction life actions within a community of Metis believers, as they show how the reality of the Rou Garous' existence within feminine genders becomes an accepted modality. Readers soon recognize evidence of a Roman Catholic imposition from the priest of the community - and how his father-ruler disdain for the shapeshifter becomes established as all knowing "cause Josephine he don believe on dah Jesus an dah Virgin Mary" (Campbell, 2010, 36). Here, the narrator's mother may see Josephine as herself, and secretly knows she is beyond the "Catlic" influence (Campbell, 36), and in this realization, like Josephine, she retains her Indigenous fluidity of nationhood and gender. The notion of gender fluidity within Indigenous communities is tied to the ancient knowings of Indigenous knowledge systems (Beaucage, 2023; Sterritt, 2016; Wilson, 2015). In the case of Campbell's story, the connection of the Rou Garous to her own Nehiyawak (Cree) ancestors and knowledge system is seen as a powerful resistance to Christian indoctrination among the Cree and Metis. Cree Two-Spirit scholar Alex Wilson sanctions the notion of fluidity found in Cree cosmology and in the shapeshifting friend of the Roogaroo:

> Wesakecahk, the Cree trickster-shapeshifter who is neither man nor woman, but energy who can shapeshift into all and no genders, human and other-than-

> human form including plants and animals, water and wind, constellations and cosmos (Wilson, in Scully, 2021, p. 56).

This is not to say that the Métis of today unabashedly accept gender fluidity or multi-gendered notions of the human, or the teachings of ancient life (in part due to the strong overtures of some French Catholic traditions). However, the return to multiplicity within the notion of gender is evident and there is new founded resurgence among Two-Spirit Michif and gender diverse peoples (Beaucage, 2023; Sterritt, 2016; Wilson, 2015). In another way, the realism of the Roogaroo, along with its marked traits in story, art, film and other visualizations, is often projected through masculine characterization and by a counter-reality of fearlessness, which is almost always juxtaposed with dauntless feminine action and thought. The overtures of matrifocal governance within Métis society highlight critical factors of a feminine longevity within the culture and traditions of the Michif. Within the collections of this Roogaroo story, we see Michif literary and visual artists delineate the shapeshifter as one who imposes on both ancestral lineage and kinship sustainability. In times of trouble or injustice, when a familial or kinship disruption occurs among Métis families, we sometimes anticipate and understand emotive responses and can innately feel the rage and see the persistence of other Michif matriarchs in the protection of their children or other living relations.

Two vital tellers of the story today are Michif Two-Spirit Elder Marjorie Beaucage of Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, and Métis storyteller Cherie Dimaline of Georgian Bay, Ontario. In a mix of exposing injustice, racism, religion, and culture, each conveys the coming of the Roogaroo as a lesson in learning more about the resilience of the human condition. In Dimaline's story, *Empire of the Wild* (2021), young boys understand that they too might become one of these beings if they mistreat women or girls and family whisperings warn young girls that they must stick together, stay off the roads, and out of the woods! Dimaline tells the story of Joan, who, while searching for her missing husband (who after a great argument left her to check his traps, never to return), runs into the righteous Reverend Eugene Wolff in a revival tent. We wonder if perhaps her grandmother's story of the past gives some credence to her development of the Reverend or the 'Rogarou' in that tent! In this writing, Dimaline propels the shapeshifter into a creature who scares the *bejusus* out of the young and, as we learn about this being who is man and dog, vicious and tricky, charming and sullen, we see the slight variations from the Roogaroos of many other Michif storytellers. As Dimaline unravels her Métis cosmology of fiddle and charm, we weave through the disconnections of ancestral influence and diminishing morality, and we stay attentive to her threads of burning Métis fierceness within a memory-back approach to projects of both justice and life change.

Comparatively, in Beaucage's film *Rougarou* (2014), her storytelling with grade students presents a mystic Michif cosmology in which the moon's appearance is a necessity before the story can take its rightful shape. In the dark of night the Rougarou is almost revealed in this brightness and we learn that a really old man - a traditional Métis keeper, a friend, and a card player - is the one responsible for the teaching of compassion, a necessity so needed within all humanity and among the Métis. In this participatory story, the very young learn that life itself has turns and twists; there is always somewhat of a mystery presented in respect to what or whom we might encounter and what we might do on a life path when we recall this meeting. The mystique in all of who we are and whom we become has connections to blood memory and ancestral influence, and it will always be this way (Ziarkowska, 2015; Richardson, 2022). It is within this story of the *Rougarou* (2014) that Beaucage shows children that a life journey helps them learn lessons of kindness and wisdom in the reach for new possibilities of transformation.

These stories, as mine, are based on interpretations of real happenings, familial encounters, or a passing down of teachings from Michif ancestors. My knowledge of the Roogaroo was one founded within mythology until it became solidified several years ago on a hot August day, when a trip to the river with my sister, my son, and my daughter turned into the unexpected. From this one encounter, the notion of shapeshifting has become very real to me—and herein lies the beauty of Michif women and all their stories of the Roogaroo as shapeshifter, and life changer.

shape shifter

you don't look like an indian she said
admiring her high cheekbones
briere nose, old passport photos.
you really don't, not like me.

one time, up the river she saw windigo
in the willows
near the cree burial grounds
perched up on the bank
of the south weir on amisk.

she watched him
and he watched her back.

you don't look like an indian she said
and maybe she is right
'cause i don't shape shift like her
and i've never seen the rougaru.

tahkwahni wapikwani iskwew (Margaret Kress) in *Honouring Indigenous Women*, 2012, 65.

Figure 1: Shapeshifter*; © tahkwahni wapikwani iskwew (Margaret Kress) 2023*

About the Author

Margaret Kress is Saskatchewan-born woman from Treaty Four and the Métis Homelands who honours her Michif/French/English/German ancestors. Her role as Adjunct Professor at the University of New Brunswick supports students in the study and reclaiming of Indigenous historical, ecological, and cultural knowledges and systems. As a scholar, teacher, and researcher, she elevates transformative, inclusive, and Indigenous storywork and engages in academic and community-based research to support initiatives led by Indigenous communities.

Notes on word variation

In this writing, Michif may be presented interchangeably as Métisse, Métis, Metis or metis, and may be used in the plural or singular form to describe a peoples, and in some cases it defines the language of the peoples. The descriptive old word of the peoples was "Michifs" or métchifs which came from a variation of métif or mitif.

Roogaroo has noted variations within the spelling including Rougarou, Rou Garous, Rogarou, Rugarou, and others.

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Who Saw Her First?
The Tangled Sight-Lines of Medieval Romance and Marian Piety

ROBERT DINAPOLI, PhD

Abstract

The cult of the Virgin Mary, which has origins in early medieval devotional practice, fostered a profusion of richly evocative imagery, much of which was taken up in later centuries by Romance texts that transfer elements of Mary's idealised womanhood onto the new ideal of the idealised feminine vision of courtly love. Both visions posit a transcendent other who offers comfort, inspiration and hope to her devotee.

Keywords: Marian devotion, medieval romance, courtly love

Résumé

Le culte de la Vierge Marie, que l'on retrouve en Europe dans les pratiques de dévotion dès le début de l'ère médiévale, a nourri une riche imagerie évocative, que l'on retrouve dans les siècles qui suivirent dans les textes de la Romance. Ceux-ci ont transfèrer les éléments de la féminité idéalisée de Marie vers la nouvelle vision féminine idéalisée de l'amour courtois. Les deux visions se rejoignent en supposant un transcendent autre qui offre confort, inspiration, and espoir aux dévots de Marie.

Mot-clés: dévotion Mariale, romance médiéval, amour courtois

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He cast his eye upon Emelya,
And therwithal he bleynte and cride, "A!"
As though he stongen were unto the herte.
(*The Canterbury Tales*, fragment 1[A] ll.1077-79)[1]

He cast his eye upon Emily,
And there and then he blanched and cried "A!"
As though he had been pierced to the heart.

This is how Palamon, one of the hero-rivals of Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, catches his first glimpse of Emily, the sister-in-law of Duke Theseus, from a high window of the tower in which he and his cousin Arcite have been imprisoned for their part in a Theban civil war. The grim surrounds of the cousins' confinement fall away in a moment of recognition that elicits only an inarticulate cry or sob from the stricken knight. Recognition, but of *what*, exactly? Chaucer plays this moment for comic misunderstanding. Arcite interprets Palamon's 'A!' as an expression of his cousin's distress at their hopeless confinement. Palamon is quick to correct him:

The fairnesse of that lady that I see
Yond in the garden romen to and fro
Is cause of al my criyng and my wo.
I noot wher she be womman or goddesse, ,
But Venus is it soothly, as I gesse.
(*The Canterbury Tales*, fragment 1[A] ll.1098-1102)

The beauty of that lady who I see
Roaming yonder in the garden to and fro
Is the cause of all my crying and my woe.
I know not if she be woman or goddess
but it is surely Venus, as I guess.

This is love at first sight, so sudden and absolute that Palamon mistakes it for a literal epiphany: his first response is to kneel and pray to Venus, the goddess he imagines has appeared to him. When Arcite takes his own peep out the window, he is similarly stricken, and the two wrangle bitterly over who saw Emily first. Arcite will argue that *he* did, since Palamon mistook her for a goddess, while he saw a woman of flesh and blood.

Who is right? This parallax between Palamon's religiose prostration and Arcite's more down-to-earth sensibilities allows Chaucer gently to mock the medieval romance tradition, which by his fourteenth-century moment had profoundly influenced European

[1] Middle English text from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson *et al.*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). All translations or modernisations of Old or Middle English texts are my own.

literature for more than two centuries. It is a tradition of many parts, drawing on chivalric culture's growing consciousness of its own oddly contrary sensibilities: warrior stoicism against erotic emotionalism, the social confinement of etiquette and politesse against the lover's impatience with all boundaries, and an idealisation of the feminine that draws on the culture of devotion to the Virgin Mary which took powerful hold of the Christian imagination at roughly the same time.

Both romance sensibilities and Marian pietism sprang from deep roots we can now unravel only partly. Their shared archetypes of exalted female figures—mother and beloved, supernally imposing and infinitely desirable, numinously erotic—suggest a common psychological dimension that resists merely historical analysis. Outwardly diffuse and even antithetical at points, the medieval traditions of high reverence for the courtly lady and for Mary as the queen of heaven speak a mutually intelligible language, overlapping and intersecting across complex histories that appear to reach much farther back than the Middle Ages.

Earlier English texts do embody Marian sensibilities, but they tend to speak feelingly about high theological abstractions. Surviving Anglo-Saxon poetry contains a number of pieces that allow us a glimpse of early medieval Marian devotion. A typical example is this passage from an address to Mary in the ninth Advent lyric in the sequence that opens the Exeter Book:

> Wlat þa swa wis-fæst witga geond þeod-land
> oþ þæt he gestarode þær gestaþelad wæs
> æþelic ingong. Eal wæs gebunden
> deoran since. duru ormæte,
> wundur-clommum bewriþen. Wende swiðe
> þæt ænig elda æfre ne meahte
> swa fæstlice fore-scyttelsas
> on ecnesse o inhebban,
> oþþe ðæs ceaster-hlides clustor onlucan,
> ær him godes engel þurh glædne geþonc
> þa wisan onwrah ond þæt word acwæð:
> "Ic þe mæg secgan" —þæt soð gewearð —
> "þæt ðas gyldnan gatu giet sume siþe
> god sylf wile Gæstes mægne
> gefælsian, Fæder ælmihtig,
> ond þurh þa fæstan locu foldan neosan,
> ond hio þonne æfter him ece stondeð
> simle singales swa beclysed
> þæt nænig oþer, nymðe nergend god,
> hy æfre ma eft onluceð."

Nu þæt is gefylled þæt se froda þa
mid eagum þær on wlatade.
þu eart þæt weall-dor, þurh þe waldend Frea
æne on þas eorðan ut siðade
ond efne swa þec gemette, meahtum gehrodene,
clæne ond gecorene, Crist ælmihtig.
Swa ðe æfter him engla Þeoden
eft unmæle ælces þinges
lioþu-cægan bileac, lifes brytta.
(*The Advent Lyrics*, IX.306-334)[2]

The wise prophet then peered across his land
till he gazed upon a nobly founded gate.
Precious treasures bound that massive door,
all festooned with many wondrous chains.
He quickly realised that no human being
for all eternity, could ever raise
such fixed and massive bolts, or ever release
that city-portal's gates, before God's angel,
with glad intent, showed to him the way
pronouncing this speech: "I can say to you—"
which came to be in truth—"that God himself
will cleanse these gates in some time yet to come,
through the power of the Spirit, the Father almighty
and past those fast-shut bars shall seek the earth.
And after him, eternally, they'll stand,
always and forever closed so fast
that no one else, except for the Saviour God,
shall ever thereafter unlock them." Now what he saw,
that wise man, with his eyes, has come to pass.
You are that gate, through whom the regal Prince
singularly emerged upon this earth,
all-powerful Christ, and just so came to meet you,
unsullied and select, with virtues adorned.
Behind him, life's dispenser, angels' prince,
once more secured you with your own limbs' key,
in every aspect still immaculate.

This passage, composed perhaps during the ninth or tenth centuries, combines elements of contemplative regard, praise-hymn, and petition. It remains formally in touch with

[2] Old English text from *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. Mary Clayton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013).

orthodox angelology, Christology, and soteriology, while expressing wonder at the depth of God's grace revealed through his humble handmaiden. Its central image is the fanciful elaboration of a vision (mistakenly attributed by the poet to Isaiah) that occurs in Ezekiel 44:1-2, where the Spirit of Yahweh transports Ezekiel to 'the outer east gate of the sanctuary' of Solomon's temple and announces its closure. None shall pass through before God himself does so at some future time. The biblical passage simply names the temple's eastern gate, which this passage magnifies into a cyclopean portal, a 'massive door, / festooned with many wondrous chains,' noble, bolted and barred until God's return.[3] The poet identifies this cosmic gate with Mary herself, the chains and bars her virginity, her womb the gate through which God, in the person of Christ, will return to the world, thereby opening a passage for all humankind to be restored to its prelapsarian bliss. Like a good householder, he secures those gates behind him, a confirmation of Mary's perpetual virginity. A triumphant bit of theology is given both a concrete and a highly aestheticized voice.

The seventh Advent Lyric plays out a dialogue between the pregnant Mary and her husband Joseph, in which she eases his agonised doubts about her virtue. In the process she gives first-hand witness to the miracle of the immaculate conception. The scene emphasises the human dimension of Joseph's experience, but his words express a poignant squawk at the affront delivered to earthly reason by the formal doctrine. The episode is basically catechism dressed up as domestic melodrama. Some centuries later, different sensibilities have begun to colour the literature of Marian devotion and reflection. Consider this brief but deeply affecting lyric from the early thirteenth century, which renders a *pietá* of Mary grieving for her dead son against a mysterious vegetative setting:

Now goth sonne under wod:	Now the sun goes under the wood:
Me reweth, Marye, thy faire rode.	I pity, Mary, thy beautiful face.
Now goth sonne under tre:	Now the sun goes under the tree:
Me reweth, Marye, thy sone and thee.[4]	I pity, Mary, thy son and thee.

[3] Ezekiel 10:18-19 earlier describes the departure of God's glory or *shekinah* from the desecrated temple of Solomon:

> The glory of Yahweh then came out over the temple threshold and paused over the winged creatures. These raised their wings and rose from the ground as I watched, and the wheels were beside them. They paused at the entrance to the east gate of the Temple of Yahweh, with the glory of the God of Israel over them, above" (*The New Jerusalem Bible*, gen. ed. Henry Wansbrough, New York: Doubleday, 1985. All biblical quotations will be taken from this translation).

Ezekiel's vision of this celestial chariot is the foundational text of the *merkabah* (Hebrew: chariot) tradition of *kabbala*, a later Jewish mystical tradition that incorporates many female elements into its vision of the divine.

[4] 'Pity for Mary,' from *Medieval English Lyrics*, ed. R.T. Davies (London: Faber, 1963).

A more intimately personal note has entered into this speaker's relationship with Mary. She is wholly human here rather than the humble handmaid who is at the same time God's interdimensional cosmic portal into our world. Her grief is lit by a sun that descends *under wod*: literally, under the wood. The image is of a deep red sun falling behind a thick stand of trees, an inherently atmospheric scene lent extra depth by the assonance of *sonne* (sun) and the fourth line's *sone* (son). Mary's *faire rode* (fair face) *reweth* the speaker (literally, it rues me, i.e., demands his rue: his pity or compassion). But *rode* is also the Middle English form of early modern English *rood*. Both words mean cross or crucifix, to which the *tre* that ends the third line lends its archetypal heft. Mary's son 'goes under the tree,' most likely in the sense of being deposed from the cross after his death, a setting sun/son. The poem clearly references the crucifixion, yet its compressed polysemy and evocative tableau of mother, son, and tree suggest any number of the dying-god vegetation myths that, from an orthodox Christian vantage, anticipate Christ's torment on *his* tree.

Tammuz and Inanna are here, as are Isis and Osiris, Venus and Adonis, or, in another register, Persephone and Demeter. Mary's grief figures all those grieving mothers and bereft lovers of myth. The mother-and-child motif has an ancient provenance: Egyptian images of Isis suckling the infant Horus anticipate medieval and renaissance art depicting the Madonna and child. The word *madonna* is simply Italian for 'my lady' and could be used with equal propriety to express reverence for Mary, respect towards a feudal duke's duchess (the courtier's 'm'lady'), or a passionate courtly devotion to a beloved.

Beyond these associations, the fair face of Mary in this lyric lends her something of the grace of the courtly lady as well, a small hint that has suggested to me the substance of this discussion: that in the centuries between *The Advent Lyrics* and 'Pity for Mary,' a mysterious psycho-spiritual upheaval rearranged the mental furniture of the Western imagination. It made itself felt in a number of different dimensions, most notably in the language of Marian devotion and courtly romance. The exalted courtly lady and the Queen of Heaven are perhaps avatars of Robert Graves' White Goddess, who in them reclaims a new eminence after centuries of suppression under the auspices of both Imperial Rome and the fathers and bishops of Christianity's early centuries, who inherited ancient Rome's strongly patriarchal tendencies.

We can read the seismic trace of this rearrangement by considering its effects in both Marian and courtly traditions, particularly in the language taken up in parallel by hymns and by the poetry of medieval romance. And not just in parallel: from the earliest romance texts we can sense the reciprocal incursions of each tradition on the other's domain. In the late twelfth century, Chrétien de Troyes, a courtier of both Marie de France and Eleanor of Aquitaine, gathered a number of popular traditions into a sequence of verse narratives set in the Arthurian world. This 'new' realm of chivalric romance,

ostensibly Christian, preserves many elements it absorbed from sources far older than the faith that structures its characters' beliefs and actions.

Folklore, legend, and myth, transmitted orally from unknown reaches of past time, left half-glimpsed deposits of alien sensibilities that gleam from behind the muscular piety of Chrétien's characters. Consider the mixed semiotics of a passage from his *Le Chevalier de la Charette* (The Knight of the Cart). Lancelot, on a quest to rescue the kidnapped Queen Guinevere, is travelling in the company of a maiden he'd previously rescued from *her* captor along the way—we can for now simply note how such secondary services to womankind, in addition to his unwavering devotion to Guinevere, are a keynote of Lancelot's calling. Here the pair come upon a comb of gilded ivory left lying on a flat stone by a brook. He is struck by its beauty, and even more by the beauty of the golden hair caught in its teeth. The maiden asks Lancelot for the comb, but she suggests that he keep the hair, which, she offhandedly informs him, is Guinevere's. The effect of that intelligence is electric:

> He was willing for her to have the comb, but first he removed the hair, being careful not to break a single strand. Never will the eye of man see anything receive such reverence, for he began to adore the hair, touching it a hundred thousand times to his eye, his mouth, his forehead and his cheeks. He expressed his joy in every way imaginable and felt himself most happy and rewarded. He placed the hair on his breast near his heart, between his shirt and his skin. He would not have traded it for a cart loaded with emeralds or carbuncles; nor did he fear that ulcers or any other disease could afflict him; he had no use for magic potions mixed with pearls, nor for drugs against pleurisy, nor for theriaca,[5] nor even for prayers to Saint Martin and Saint James. He placed so much faith in these strands of hair that he felt no need for any other aid.[6]

Lancelot's reverence toward stray strands of his beloved's hair mimics the reverence a Christian might offer a saint's relics. For him, Guinevere's hair is beyond compare or price, an absolute good that will not suffer any this-for-that chafferings of exchange. This minuscule fraction of Guinevere's physical presence weighs in her lover's mind with the force of a wholly realised archetype. He handles it with a tender solicitude, as though it actually were Guinevere herself. In this moment, it *is* Guinevere, as the bread of the eucharist *is* the body of Christ when it is elevated at the consecration. Like the eucharist, Lancelot accords it a sovereign power over disease, over all medicines or even the intercessory powers of the saints. Chrétien's psychology is careful here: the hair's numinous presence shines for Lancelot alone. Is it merely a fancy of his imagination?

[5] a medicinal paste made from various drugs mixed with honey

[6] From Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier de la Charette* (late twelfth century), translated by William W. Kibler, in *Arthurian Romances* (Penguin, 1991), p. 225.

When he later rescues Guinevere and the two arrange a tryst before their return to Camelot, he approaches her in a state of quasi-religious awe:

> He came next to that [bed] of the queen; Lancelot bowed low and adored her, for in no holy relic did he place such faith.[7]

Guinevere has here become an artefact of the numinous, a piece of heaven footing earth. Her elevation complements how 'Pity for Mary' draws Mary's grief into sharp focus as that of an all-too-human mother, amidst the swirl of high powers at play in her son's crucifixion. These depictions of elevated queen and humanised Queen cross at their shared visions of woman-as-archetype. The Lady and the lady assume each other's guises, in a game of diction and image that plays out across the rest of the Middle Ages and beyond.

A century or so after Chrétien, Dante was to construct an elaborate edifice of romantic theology,[8] which he proposes in response to the glimpses of heaven that came to him in the person of a young Florentine lady, Beatrice Portinari. Their brief acquaintance (she married elsewhere and died relatively young) left Dante literally stunned. He later recorded his experiences a short treatise, *Vita Nuova*, in which he reflects on the emotional and spiritual upheavals prompted by the advent of Beatrice into his consciousness, in a mixture of prose exposition and verse celebration. The *canzone* that opens its nineteenth chapter, *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore*, ('Ladies who possess an understanding of love'), contains this sonnet-stanza in praise of Beatrice:

> My lady is desired in highest heaven;
> a lady who aspires to graciousness
> should seek her company, for when she walks,
> Love drives a killing frost into vile hearts
> that freezes and destroys their every thought;
> and dare a thought remain to look at her
> it has to change to good or else must die;
> and if she finds one worthy to behold her,
> he feels her power, for her least salutation
> bestows salvation on this favoured one
> and humbles him till he forgets all wrongs.
> This too has God Almighty graced her with:

[7] *ibid.*, p. 264.

[8] The term was coined in the early twentieth century by the English poet and novelist Charles Williams in his account of how Dante's vision of romantic love influenced Western thought and imagination. Williams wrote his treatise in 1924, but it did not appear in print until *Outlines of Romantic Theology* (ed. Alice Mary Hadfield) was published in 1990 by Wm. B. Eerdmans.

whoever speaks with her shall speak with him.[9]

Dante calls on an imagined audience of *donne* (ladies, singular *donna*, from the feminine form of the Latin *dominus*, lord) as judges empanelled to pronounce on his declarations of courtly sensibilities, inspired by his own *donna*, Beatrice. His argument synthesises all the elements that compose the full romance paradigm, of which Dante is the foremost expositor. In his vision, love wields a quasi-divine power, channelled through the idealised form and character of the beloved, whose mere presence lifts her lover's spirit heavenward. Every modern love-cliché about being in heaven, every pop-song from *Cheek to Cheek*[10] to *Singing in the Rain* to *Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic*, or simply our fundamental notions of falling in love betrays the far-off but still palpable influence of Dante's imagination. But such a power, like God's own omnipotence, overawes its devotee, demanding a perfection in his character to match that of his beloved. No mortal thing can behold the unmediated divine and live, and yet, paradoxically, such a vision can afford its recipient a fleeting taste of heaven's beatitude in the mortal body of this life.

The experience of being in love, even more so of *falling* in love, has always eluded proper characterisation or definition. The modern experience, however jostled in the hectic domains of social media and dating apps, still draws significantly on the celebration of love in the courtly literatures of the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The sudden revelation to the lover of the beloved as an incomparable paragon, as someone might experience it today, owes much of its force to Dante's recall of his raptures over his discovery of Beatrice's perfections, whether we know it or not.

Dante's ideal of romantic love wields an exalted yet terrifying power, as this next passage, from the third chapter of *Vita Nuova*, dramatises. After a first encounter with Beatrice at nine years of age, their paths cross once more nine years later. She acknowledges Dante with a smile, which sends him back to his chamber to contemplate this unexpected miracle:

> In my reverie a sweet sleep seized me, and a marvellous vision appeared to me. I seemed to see a cloud the colour of fire in my room and in that cloud a lordly man, frightening to behold, yet apparently marvellously filled with joy. He said many things, of which I understood only a few; among them was, 'I am your master.' It seemed to me that in his arms there lay a figure asleep and naked except for a crimson cloth loosely wrapping it. Looking at it very intently, I realised that it was the lady of the blessed greeting [i.e. Beatrice], the lady who earlier in the day had favoured me with her salutation. In one of his hands he held a fiery object, and he seemed to say these words: 'Behold your heart.' And after a short while, he seemed to awaken the sleeping one,

[9] From the nineteenth chapter of *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990), p. 36.
[10] With its opening line of "Heaven, I'm in heaven . . ."

> and through the power of his art made her eat this burning object in his hand.[11]

Dante's dream vision draws on allegory to consummate its fusion of romance and religious sensibilities. The man both 'lordly' and 'frightening,' yet also 'filled with joy,' identifies himself only as Dante's 'master.' His presence presides over both the exaltation and the abjection the lover may experience. Not quite Eros/Cupid, this figure acts as both mystagogue and torturer, the psychopomp of Dante's initiation into a cult of love. The grotesquery of the passage's shrouded female figure being fed Dante's own burning heart captures the totality of the courtly lover's devotion to his beloved, which trumps every other demand on his attention and loyalties. Beatrice will of course go on to centre the entire narrative of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*.[12] She stands in a chain of feminine command, dispatched by the Virgin herself to rescue Dante from the risk of damnation in which he stands in the prelude to *Inferno*. By the end of the *Purgatorio*, she takes over from the chaperone she'd arranged to conduct the poet through the circles of hell and purgatory, the Roman poet Virgil. Her every appearance is an epiphany, and she ultimately conducts Dante up through the crystal spheres of the planets, across the empyrean, to the fences of heaven itself, where he can behold the multifoliate rose that seats the souls of the blessed in heaven's bliss.

The thirteenth century *Romance of the Rose*[13] reaches an earthier climax, in the centre of an allegorical rose-garden that serves as a horticultural emblem of the *inner* topography of the character and emotions of the protagonist, replete with allegorical figures who represent the challenges and rebuffs he faces in his courtship of his beloved in the waking world. His long-deferred plucking of the rose at the centre of that allegorical garden is a frankly sexual gesture, haloed by the quasi-religious character of his quest or pilgrimage. Dante's explicitly religious pilgrimage proceeds under the *aegis* of an historical, earthly beloved. He and the dreamer of *The Romance of the Rose* quest seek very different ends, yet each traverses symbolic landscapes that embody highly structured schemes of values that centre on an informing female presence.

I possess neither the learning nor the leisure to delve into the labyrinthine back-channels of goddess-worship in the ancient Near East and Europe, let alone in the rest of the world. For the purposes of this discussion, I need only acknowledge its presence and try to register a few of its higher harmonics that resonate in later stages of subsequent cultures and their literatures. In very different ways, English-language poets (to speak of something I know a little about) have hummed in sympathy, knowingly or subliminally.

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[11] *ibid.*, p. 6.
[12] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).
[13] Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Harry W. Robbins, ed. Charles W. Dunn (New York: Meridian, 1962).

Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*[14] and Ted Hughes' *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*[15] explore the impact of the goddess-archetype and her many avatars on the poetic imagination of different times and tempers.[16] The quip attributed to Freud, that 'everywhere I go I find a poet has been there before me,' though apocryphal, suggests how the poetic imagination can draw on psychic resources laid down long ages before its own time. Many suspect that such a dynamic drove the literatures of Marian devotion and courtly love along parallel paths that have crossed and recrossed many times, during the Middle Ages and beyond. Their reciprocal resonance has been mooted by generations of scholarship, and behind it lies a long and mostly obscure history of female agency once attributed to the divine, subsequently suppressed yet irrepressible. Judaism's worship of its solitary (and occasionally tetchy) bachelor deity Yahweh, who will have no other gods before him, represents a relatively rare phenomenon in the history of world religions. Although the three faiths 'of the book,' Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and their strident monotheism account for a sizeable proportion of the world's religious identities today, they remain outnumbered historically by countless polytheistic faiths that went before them. This they represent as a kind of progress, from 'primitive' superstition that located deity in networks of anthropomorphic family relationship to the enlightened acknowledgement of a singular godhead that transcends simplistic analogy to human family dynamics.

Yet this before-and-after sequestering of a benighted pagan past from its Christian successor overlooks its fitful persistence. The odd Christian saint's life from late classical and early medieval sources can conceal a surprise or two. Though deeply formulaic and dedicated to promoting orthodox church teaching, the genre sometimes seems to hear a subtly eccentric music, whose narrative elements can suggest curious genealogies. The legend of St Eustace (a saint of uncertain provenance, set aside in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* as 'of unknown date and quite probably of no historical existence'[17]) is a mostly by-the-numbers tale of miraculous conversion and martyrdom, but its central miracle sits a little oddly alongside its more conventional elements. Eustace appears to have been a popular figure in medieval England. The scrupulously orthodox Anglo-Saxon homilist Ælfric of Eynsham includes him in his *Lives of the Saints*, where he tells how, under the reign of the emperor Trajan, a military commander named Placidas (the future St Eustace), while indulging his favourite pastime of hunting, encountered an extraordinarily large and beautiful hart. He follows it into the wilderness, till it turns to face him upon a high rock, which is where things get a little strange:

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[14] *The White Goddess*: *A Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948, rpt. [ed. Grevel Lindop] Carcanet Press,1997).
[15] Faber & Faber, 1993.
[16] Graves' and Hughes' tumultuous relationships with accomplished fellow-poets (Laura Riding and Sylvia Plath respectively), while matters of historical record, from certain distances and perspectives seem confused echoes of the goddess-worship they pursue in their researches.
[17] David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), p. 154.

> Witodlice betwux þæs heortes hornum glitnode gelicnys þære halgan cristes rode breohtre þonne sunnan leoma and seo anlyicnysse ures drihtnes hælendes cristes, and he mennisce spræce asende on þone heort and clypode to placidam þus cwæþende, Eala placida . hwi ehtest þu *min* efne for þinum intingum ic com nu þæt ic þurh þis nyten þe me ætywde.[18]
>
> Clearly between the hart's horns there shone a likeness of the holy cross of Christ, brighter than the light of the sun, and the likeness of our lord saviour Christ, and he conferred human speech on the hart, and called out to Placidas, speaking thus: "Oh, Placidas, why do *you* pursue *me*, when for your very sake have I now come, that I might show myself to you through this beast?"

Here the edifying saint's life briefly takes on the character of folklore and popular legend, with its talking animal and its hunter who unexpectedly finds his place changed with that of his prey. Miracle or faerie magic? The Christological framing of this anecdote more or less answers that question for us from a purely ideological perspective, but is that the whole story? The hunt motif is a staple feature of myth and folklore. Archetypal hunters such as Nimrod, Actaeon, and Orion (to name only a few) figure both a primordially necessary human activity and the psychic dimensions of aspiration, quest, and pride. The crossing of this mythical fixture with the much younger discourses of hagiography and Christology frames the overlap between Marian and courtly discourses the rest of this paper considers.

Medieval romance on its own embodies a hectic crossroads of myth, folklore, and Christian sensibilities. The narratives that constitute the Welsh *Mabinogion*, for example, comprise a compendium of archaic legend peppered with Christian expostulation and a later courtly ethos. The hero of its very first narrative, Pwyll, the prince of Dyfed, embarks on a series of otherworld adventures that begins with a hunt which takes an unexpected turn.[19] The queens and enchantresses who weave in and out of Arthurian legend, wielding uncanny powers, reflect distant recollections of a number of female deities found in different Celtic traditions. The anonymous fourteenth-century comic masterpiece *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* pits a peerless Christian knight, who carries an image of the blessed Virgin emblazoned on the inside of his shield to remind him of the reverence he owes her, against a Green-Man analogue who embodies deeply archaic nature and fertility sensibilities. Their story's genial denouement suggests something of the ease with which religious and courtly tradition could exchange imagery and sensibilities.

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[18] *IIII NON. NOVEMBR. PASSIO SANCTI EUSTACHII MARTYRIS SOCIORUMQUE EIUS. Ælfric's Lives of the Saints* vol. 2 (EETS o.s. 94 and 114), XXX, ed. Walter W. Skeat (London: Oxford UP, 1890 and 1900, rpt. in one volume 1966), p. 192.

[19] *The Mabinogion*, trans. Sioned Davies (New York: Oxford UP, 2007).

Against this broad background of romance syncretism and Christian reverence for Christ's lady-mother, the tighter emotional focus of courtly love-lyric and Marian devotional poetry achieves its own cross-threaded balance. Here is a typical English example from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century:

Ase I me rod this ender day,	As I rode out the other day,
By grene wode to seche play,	to take my pleasure by a green wood,
Mid herte I thoghte all on a may,	my heart dwelt all upon a maiden,
Swetest of alle thinge.	the sweetest creature of all.
Lithe, and ich ou telle may	Pay attention, and I can tell you
All of that swete thing.	all about that sweet creature.
This maiden is swete and fre of blod,	This maiden is sweet, of noble blood,
Bright and fair, of milde mod;	radiant, fair, of gracious heart;
Alle he may don us god,	she can do good to everyone,
Thurh hire besechinge.	through her intercession.
Of hire he tok flesh and blod,	He took flesh and blood of her,
Jesus, Hevene Kinge.	Jesus, heaven's king
With all my lif I love that may:	With all my life I love that maiden:
He is my solas night and day,	She is my solace night and day,
My joye and eke my beste play,	my joy, my finest pleasure too,
And eke my love-longinge.	and my love-longing as well.
All the betere me is that day	The day is all the better for me
that ich of hire singe.[20]	whenever I sing of her.

This poem's opening is pure medieval love-lyric, with its stylised pastoral setting and its speaker's compulsion to celebrate his *may* (maiden or young woman, one of the more common words that can name a courtly love-interest). That she should be 'swete and fre of blod' will surprise no one familiar with courtly convention. But the second stanza closes with the startling revelation that this singer's rapture celebrates no object of physical or sexual desire, rather the woman from whom Jesus took 'flesh and blood.' Where a lover stung by desire into song would commonly play petitioner for his lady's exclusive favour, this speaker identifies *his* lady's 'besechinge,' i.e. Mary's power to intercede for us sinners before God's judgement seat, as a blessing available to all. The third stanza resumes the note of exuberant love: both Mary and the lover's maiden figure as *solas* (solace) in their respective traditions, a source of both delight and profound comfort for their devotees: the sequence of 'joye,' 'play,' and 'love-longinge' resonates with an expansive sense of possibility and unlooked-for hope, equally apt to both the lover and the Marian devotee.

[20] from 'The Five Joys of Mary,' in *Medieval English Lyrics*, ed. R.T. Davies (London: Faber, 1963).

A similar sensibility informs the poem known as *Pearl*, the first piece in the same manuscript as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, most likely composed by the same poet. Excerpts cannot hope to capture in full the strange atmosphere of this powerful dream vision, but these brief samples will suffice to suggest its visionary confluence of celestial and earthly airs, centred on its primary speaker, the pearl of the poem's title who appears to the narrator in a luminous setting that comprises equal parts of faerie and heaven:

Mor mervayl con my dome adaunt:	A further marvel daunted my discernment:
I saw biyonde that mery mere.	I saw beyond that happy pool
crystal clyff ful relusaunt;	a crystal cliff entirely resplendent;
Mony ryal ray con fro hit rere;	from it many royal rays shot up;
At the fote thereof there sat a faunt,	there at its foot was seated a young child,
A mayden of mensk, ful debonere;	a dignified young girl, full debonaire;
Blysnande white was her bleaunt.	her over-cloak was radiantly white.
I knew her wel: I had sene her ere.	I knew her well: I'd seen her before this.
As glysnande gold that man con schere,	Like glistening gold that men cut into threads,
So schon that schene anunder schore.	so on the far shore that brilliant creature shone.
On lenghe i loked to her there:	Long I gazed upon her there:
The lenger, I knew her more and more.	the longer, I recognised her all the more.

(III.157-168)

All blysnande white was her beau mys,	Her beautiful stole was a refulgent white
Open at sides, and bounden bene	open at the sides, and clasped about
With the meriest margarys at my devise.	by the gladdest pearls that I could ever wish,
that ever I saw yet with myn ene,	that ever I'd seen before with my own eyes,
With lappes large, I wot and wene,	long-hanging sleeves, as I believed I saw,
Dubbed with double perle and dight,	bespangled and arrayed with double pearls.
Her kyrtel of self sute schene.	Her kirtle shone in matching hues,
With precious perles all umbe pyght.	embroidered all about with precious pearls.
A pyght coroune yet wer that gyrle.	A crown, with pearls adorned, that child wore too,
Of margarys and non other stone,	with pearls and with no other precious stone,
High pynacled of clere white perle,	its lofty crest made all of clear white pearl,
With flurted flowres perfet upon;	upon it flowers perfectly arranged.
To hed had ho non other werle.	No other circlet did she wear on her head.

(IV.197-209)[21]

The speaker has fallen asleep, exhausted by a long, futile search for his pearl, whose unaccountable loss has left him desolate. Though this pearl is never fully identified, it clearly references a longed-for female presence. Readers identify her variously, most often as the speaker's young daughter, taken by a tragically premature death, sometimes

[21] from *The Works of the* Gawain-*Poet*, ed. Ad Putter and Myra Stokes (London: Penguin Classics, 2014).

as a lost beloved, like Beatrice (whose epiphanies in Dante's writings resemble those of this pearl's). From her first appearance, the pearl-maiden is shrouded in lovely but impenetrable ambiguity. She appears to the dreamer in a resplendent array of white silks and pearls. Pearls *everywhere*: embroidered on her clothing, encrusting her belt, set thickly on her crown. To a medieval imagination, her attire would speak a language of utmost purity, in which spotless white cloth and the pure white of doves, pearls, and lilies figure most often. She is set apart: she stands opposite the dreamer across a river, before a city whose crystal walls, we later learn, are those of the Book of Revelation's New Jerusalem. Yet she is not wholly other: though she appears very young, the speaker insists from his first glimpse that he *knows* her, though it takes time before he realises that this is *his* pearl, the pearl he'd been seeking so desperately before he fell asleep. To any reader familiar with medieval iconography, the maiden's attire clearly reflects the way Mary is represented as the ultimate archetype of human purity: immaculate, without spot or stain such as ordinary mortals accumulate across the experience of lifetimes on the hither shore.

But the pearl-maiden stands on the far shore, sundered from the dreamer, which implies that she is the dreamer's daughter or other beloved who has died. The poem's deep emotional currents of love, loss, recognition and restored hope lend the dreamer and the maiden's metaphysical, philosophical, and theological exchanges (which constitute the bulk of the poem) the character of romance speculation in a quasi-Dantean mode. That it centres on a female character who one critic has described as 'a lesser Mary'[22] hints at another dimension of the affinity between Marian and romance traditions: the commanding, sometimes imperious presence of their central female *personae*. The idealised feminine embodies a locus of power that stands both within and over the patterns of masculine authority that structure medieval society. The *Pearl*-maiden is clearly a child, which hints allegorically at the perpetual burgeoning freshness of the soul, but in her role as docent and mystagogue, she also inverts medieval conventions of authority: the child instructs the parent, the daughter her father.[23]

Across the later Middle Ages, the courtly lover's devotion to his beloved and the faithful Christian's to Mary trade places in a dance of registers. Examples are not hard to find, as the following handful attest:

[22] Karen Saupe, 'Middle English Marian Lyrics: Introduction,' https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/saupe-middle-english-marian-lyrics-introduction.
[23] In this she resembles the more mature figure of Lady Philosophy in Boethius' fifth-century *Consolation of Philosophy*, who visits the imprisoned author to refresh his understanding of (and submission to) her teachings.

Guido Guinizelli (1230-1276)[24]

Io voglio del ver la mia donna laudare

I truly wish to give my lady praise
And liken her to lily and to rose:
Brighter than morning star she comes and glows
And makes me think of all that heavenly blaze.
Green banks I compare with her, I compare the skies,
Flowers of every color, yellow and green,
Azure and gold, the richest jewels to be seen;
Through her even Love feels his value rise.

She passes in the streets, noble, adorned;
She humbles the pride of any with her greeting,
And skeptics to believers quickly are turned;
No wicked man with her would risk a meeting;
And still I say: her powers are even keener.
No man thinks evil once that he has seen her.

Gace Brulé (1170-1212)

from *De bien amer grant joie atent*
('Great joy from loving well I am awaiting')

5. Lady, none of the others is your peer.
Pretty and good, rightful receiver of lauds . . .

6.Lady, from you I'd never conceal
Any desire or any thought.
I love with a love that's real,
More than any other creature wrought.
I want to be your servant leal,
And for this end I feel so fraught
That, without some mercy, I'm all undone;
Far away or near, I can't go on.

[24] All these examples are taken from *Medieval Song***,** trans. and ed. by James J. Wilhelm (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972).

Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377)

Blanch com lys, plus que rosee vermeille

White as a lily, redder than a rose,
More splendid than a ruby oriental,
Your beauty I regard; no equal shows
White as a lily, redder than a rose.
I am so ravished, my heart know no repose
Until I serve you, a lover fine and gentle,
White as a lily, redder than a rose,
More splendid than a ruby oriental.

Walther von der Vogelweide (*ca*. 1170-*ca*.1230)

from *sô bluomen ûz dem grase dringet*

2. A noble lady, beautiful and pure,
In fancy clothes wrapped well about,
Walks among the people for delectation,
High-spirited and courteous, not demure,
Glancing on all the faces thereabout,
Shining like the sun against constellations:
Let May bring us all or his many wonders,
For which of them is something that can plunder,
Compared to the royal splendor of this lady?
Yes, we should let all of May's blossoms stand
And stare on every hand at this worthy maid.

In Italian, Old French or Provençal, or Old High German, poets such as these share not only their common matter of erotic desire, but also a common *tone* of awed wonder that cannot be wholly distinguished from the notes of religious reverence. Guinizelli's lady turns 'skeptics to believers.' Brulé begs his for 'mercy,' a common romance trope for the courtly lady's notice or affection. Von der Vogelweide's 'noble lady' shines like a Marian vision and presents like a variation of the *Pearl* maiden. De Machaut offers us his beloved, with her hues of lily and rose, in the same floral palette taken up time and again in praise of Mary, as in this stanza from a thirteenth-century Marian hymn in English:

Levedy flowre of alle thing,	Lady, flower of all things,
Rosa sine spina,	rose without a thorn,
Thu bere Jesu, Hevene King,	you bore Jesus, Heaven's King

Gratia divina. by divine grace.[25]

The beloved's advent verges on epiphany time and again: one soul's vision of another's absolute irreplaceability. Like the literal epiphanies of Jesus' baptism or his transfiguration in the gospels, of Moses' encounter with the burning bush, or even the humbler apparition of the angel of the Lord to Balaam's ass,[26] such revelations of a luminous reality of unfathomable depth challenge the waking mind's grasp of reality. In romance narrative this can even play comically: at one point in Chrétien's *Le Chevalier de la Charette*,[27] Guinevere tests Lancelot's devotion by sending word that, to please her, he must disgrace himself in a tournament by fighting badly:

> The queen summoned a clever, pretty girl to her and whispered: 'Damsel, you must take a message, quickly and without wasting words. Hurry down from these stands and go at once to that knight bearing the red shield; tell him in secret that I bid him "do his worst".'

Lancelot, of course, accedes instantly and without demur to his beloved's starkly antithetical bidding:

> The moment he heard her, Lancelot said that he would gladly do so, as one who wishes only to please his queen.[28]

Guinevere's whim makes no sense, according to any rational scheme of chivalric values, which would require Lancelot always to cultivate and defend his reputation as the world's greatest knight. His instant compliance represents a kind of abjection, willingly undergone by the devotee as a token of his subservience to the object of his devotion. Some five centuries later, Cervantes will caricature this quasi-religious, obsessive quality of generic romance behaviour in his *Don Quixote*, whose protagonist has lent his name to the English adjective 'quixotic,' which denotes behaviour that is hopelessly, uselessly, naïvely, or obsessively idealistic. Quixote dismisses every reality-check that lays him flat on his back (or reveals his beloved—and wholly imaginary—Dulcinea del Toboso to be the far less exalted Aldonza de Lorenzo) as spells cast by his wicked sorcerer-adversary.[29] The power both of deity and of an idealised feminine to unseat the normal courses of reason is absolute.

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[25] From "A Hymn to Mary," in *Medieval English Lyrics*, ed. R.T. Davies (London: Faber, 1963). The rose and lily figure as well in medieval hagiography as emblems of the saint's devotion and purity.
[26] Numbers 22:21-35.
[27] It is possible to feel in Lancelot's enforced ride in a humble farmer's wagon, which gives the story its title, a distant mockery of the *merkabah* vision of God's chariot in Ezekiel 10:18-19 (quoted above).
[28] *Le Chevalier de la Charette*, in *Arthurian Romances* (Penguin, 1991), pp. 276-277.
[29] The tumultuous denialisms of recent factions in U.S. politics (Trump, QAnon, *et al.*) sound a dismally diminished echo of Quixote's. Whether in politics or in romance gone rancid, idealism can turn toxic at its furthest extremes.

Which perhaps should not surprise us, since a higher feminine principle has commonly opposed or matched a higher masculine principle in the religious traditions of most human cultures. In this regard the masculine bias of the so-called 'religions of the book' — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — makes *them* the outliers, at least in literary terms. But the goddess gets around, in a dazzling variety of guises. Boethius' Dame Philosophy, Dante's Beatrice, the *Pearl* maiden, Guinevere, or any of the beloveds addressed in troubadour lyric or other medieval poetry all wield, in their different ways, an unanswerable authority. The voices in which they speak share a common timbre, which descends, by circuitous paths across great distances of time and cultural evolution, from prior goddess cults partly concealed in the histories of most societies.

The second-century *Golden Ass* of Lucius Apuleius tells how its protagonist (also named Lucius) meddles in magic and accidentally transforms himself into a donkey. After much comic misadventure, he recovers his proper human form through the intervention of the Egyptian goddess Isis, whose climactic epiphany comprises a long discourse that reviews the metamorphic play of her many identities across different times, places, and peoples:

> Though I am worshipped in many aspects, known by countless names, and propitiated with all manner of different rites, yet the whole round earth venerates me, The primeval Phrygians call me Pessinuntica, Mother of the gods; the Athenians, sprung from their own soil, call me Cecropian Artemis; for the islanders of Cyprus I am Paphian Aphrodite; for the archers of Crete I am Dictynna; for the trilingual Sicilians, Stygian Proserpine, and for the Eleusinians their ancient Mother of the Corn.[30]

Though still a figure of imposing power, whose roll-call of identities extends a good bit beyond the list I've quoted here, Isis turns a kindly maternal face to Lucius, as if correcting an erring but loved child. Her plural selves, which constitute a kind of genealogy of near-Eastern female deity, record the many manifestations of the goddess under many different identities. These I cannot even begin to enumerate here, but I need only note their common association with the powers of life itself, with its generation and its nurturing, but also with its many dark endings and the deep mystery of what might lie beyond the theatre of space and time whose stage it treads. These are deep waters, plumbed by Robert Graves in his study of the goddess and her guises in *The White Goddess*. He argues that Western culture has crippled itself in its default ignorance and suppression of the goddess as a psychic presence. Suppress her we may, but she's an insistent, irrepressible thing, never wholly bundled out of view. The Bible itself, the composite canon of Jewish and Christian tradition, contains hints of her presence.

[30] *The Golden Ass*, trans. Robert Graves (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1950), p. 271.

Nowhere so strongly as in the overtly female figure of Wisdom who speaks in the Book of Proverbs:

> The LORD created me at the outset of His way,
> the very first of His works of old.
> In remote eons I was shaped,
> at the start of the first things of earth.
> When there were no deeps I was spawned,
> when there were no wellsprings, water-sources.
> Before the mountains were anchored down,
> before the hills I was spawned.
> He had not yet made the earth and open land,
> and the world's first clods of soil.
> When He founded the heavens, I was there,
> when He traced a circle on the face of the deep,
> when He propped up the skies above,
> when He powered the springs of the deep,
> when He set the sea its limit
> that the water not flout his command,
> when He strengthened the earth's foundations.
> And I was by him, and intimate,
> I was His delight day after day,
> playing before Him at all times,
> playing in the world, His earth,
> and my delight was with humankind.[31]

I have cited this passage in the introduction to my recently published book on Old English wisdom poetry, and my comments there will serve equally well here:

> This extraordinary self-portrait is itself an archetypal wisdom text: it embodies distinctive features that can be found in just about any wisdom tradition you could identify. First (and perhaps foremost), it is *personal*. Wisdom is not about abstract philosophising or forensic debate. She is both a person and a personal possession, as intimately known as your best friend or your favourite song. In these lines from Proverbs, Wisdom plays the parts of God's chief engineer, personal assistant and playmate in the act of primordial creation itself. In Genesis 1:3, this is narrated as a solo verbal act: "God said: let there be light. And there was light." Well, not *quite*. Turns out he had help. And that help comes not in the shape of angels focused wholly on adoring God and performing his will, but of a *personified* Wisdom who is a friend and consort, a

[31] Trans. Robert Alter, in *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010).

> lover almost, who appears to exist coevally with God's own inconceivable eternity. She is a dancer: wisdom is supple, wisdom *moves*. She *plays* in God's presence, and she delights as well to visit the habitations of God's human creations, once they've made their entrance from the wings. Ancient Judaism's patriarchal leanings and its later embodiments in the prescriptive fixities of the law make this characterisation surprising, to say the least. Yet at the same time the rabbis delighted in the play of the dialogic imagination, in which voice answers voice answers voice in a seemingly endless speculative dance. Beyond the gender issue, moreover, the passage from Proverbs demands that we see double, in order to discern a venerable principle of cosmic making that is also a playful, fleet-footed sprite - as if a supernova could also twinkle among the bluebells at the bottom of your garden like a firefly or a fairy.[32]

Is this playful sprite yet *another* guise of the goddess? Such a suggestion might scandalise Jewish or Christian orthodoxies, which have banished her to the outermost margins of Western consciousness. Here she dances her way into one of the foundational texts of the Jewish and Christian canons. A long way from the *magna mater* of antique tradition, and consorting with a patriarchal tradition unyieldingly hostile to her archetype, yet, once more, there she stands, unmistakeably herself.

As a brief coda I would note here how the medieval romance tradition, down a different line of transmission, has bequeathed the figure of the idealised feminine to later literature as the serially imperilled heroine of sentimental fiction, from Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe to Austen's Elizabeth Bennett to Dickens' Little Nell and Little Dorrit, all the way down to even such highly ironized modern characters as Bridget Jones. With their many sisters along those extraordinarily winding and tangled paths, they share a common genealogy that can be traced back through medieval romance to early Christian hagiography, Jewish and Christian scriptural traditions, and on into the backward abysm of time where their fore-mothers dwell amid shadows we can no longer wholly illuminate.

Their influence reaches as far as our own sceptical, disillusioned modernity. Here I can cite that multifaceted conjurer of modern ironies, Marcel Proust. The narrator of his *In Search of Lost Time* establishes one parallax after another between conventional ideals and the diminished realities into which they inevitably descend in the world of experience. Whether in the visions of architectural and scenic romance his narrator expects from his first visit to Balbec by the sea, or in his friend St Loup's ecstatic, courtly declarations of his mistress's virtues, reality inevitably disappoints or crudely belies the idealist's expectations:

[32] *Reading Old English Wisdom: The Fetters in the Frost* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), p. 3.

> It was not so much that I found [St Loup's mistress] of little consequence, but that I found the power of the human imagination, the illusion that fostered the pains of love, so momentous. Robert noticed that I seemed moved. I looked away towards the pear and cherry trees in the garden opposite to make him think that it was their beauty I was moved by. And it did move me in somewhat the same way, by bringing close to me those things we not only see with our eyes but also feel in our hearts. By likening the trees I had seen in the garden to strange gods, had I not made the same mistake as Mary Magdalene when, in another garden, on a day whose anniversary was fast approaching, she saw a human form, 'supposing him to be the gardener'? Guardians of the memories of the golden age, keepers of the promise that reality is not what we suppose, that the splendour of poetry, the magical light of innocence may shine in it and may be the reward which we strive to deserve, were they not, these great white creatures so magnificently stooped over the shade that invites us to rest, to fish, to read, were they not more like angels?[33]

Disillusion bites deep. We might think there's nothing more to see here, yet, Proust insists, disillusion can conceal a deeper enchantment. His narrator notes the obvious disconnect between the ideal and the real, but in his allusion to Mary Magdalene's mistake he reverses it: her imperfect vision takes the higher for the lower, the risen Jesus for the gardener. Yet she is not disillusioned, or at least not for long: the very answer to her bereavement, its impossible reversal, stands living and breathing before her. Proust's back-to-front *exemplum* leaves his reverie unsettled: *do* our ideals conduct to heaven? *are* they angels? In the end, he appears unable or unwilling to decide. Romance casts its enchantments as far as the very brink of modernist disillusion. We may *see* them as illusion yet yield to them all the same. Are we simply to dismiss the illusion or to admire its transformative power? Proust allows both, giving a wry nod to both Dante's exalted vision of Beatrice *and* Quixote's elevation of Aldonza as his imagined Dulcinea.
Finally, even a modern American poet like Wallace Stevens, whose writing is often characterised by rigorous abstraction coupled with a kind of epistemological exuberance, systematically rioting in the particulars of the here and now, registers the draw of Dante's Beatrice: indirectly, perhaps, but palpably. His 'Study of Images II' echoes Dante's *terza rima* in its unrhymed three-line stanzas, a form Stevens favoured for some of his most adventurous work:

> The frequency of images of the moon
> Is more or less. The pearly women that drop
> From heaven and float in air, like animals

[33] *The Guermantes Way*, trans. Mark Treharne, vol. 3 of *In Search of Lost Time* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 157.

Of ether, exceed the excelling witches, whence
They came. But, brown, the ice-bear sleeping in ice-month
In his cave, remains dismissed without a dream.

As if the center of images had its
Congenial mannequins, alert to please,
Beings of other beings manifold—

The shadowless moon wholly composed of shade,
Women with other lives in their live hair,
Rose-women as half-fishes of salt shine,

As if, as if, as if the disparate halves
Of things were waiting in a betrothal known
To none, awaiting espousal to the sound

Of right joining, a music of ideas, the burning
And breeding and bearing birth of harmony,
The final relation, the marriage of the rest.[34]

This may at first appear an obscure way to close a discussion of medieval romance and Marian piety, but look closer. The archetypal feminine descends as 'pearly women.' Should we see them as versions of the Middle English *Pearl* here, or perhaps as 'women with pearls,' like a squadron of society matrons? They float like ectoplasmic apparitions, 'animals / Of ether,' as if descended from a higher realm yet somehow associated with lower living forms of will, desire, and appetite. Congenial mannequins occupy the 'center of images': human forms, perhaps the anthropomorphisms of most religions, accommodate the ursine consciousness of the brown bear, submerged in its cave and dreamless sleep, to the daunting dimensions of larger being. 'Beings of other beings manifold' suggests a larger consciousness made somehow legible to a lesser. This practically epitomises my discussion's whole thrust: the idealised visions of the feminine in romance and in Marian devotion enfold each other, in an ether that transcends the bestial brown bear dismissed to its sleep.

Above this tableau rises a moon paradoxically 'shadowless' yet 'wholly composed of shade,' in apposition to women whose hair is 'live' with a life not their own. Gorgons? Mermaids ('half-fishes of salt')? Perhaps they inhabit the indistinct twilight to which Western consciousness has banished the figures of the goddess, leaving only fragments of

[34] From *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson. New York: Library of America, 1997.

partially glimpsed myth and folk-tale behind. The moon of course presides over the realm of Diana/Artemis, one of the primary avatars of Graves' White Goddess. The triple repetition of 'as if' practically echoes the goddess's triple aspect with a subjunctive hesitancy: to modern reason, none of this manifests as objective fact - it's all 'moonshine' in one sense. Those *as if*'s hold the 'disparate halves' of things apart, another evocation of the divided human consciousness that has resulted from the goddess's exile, yet that hesitancy is also an expectancy: the halves are waiting for some utterly unknown (perhaps unknowable?) consummation that constitutes a 'right joining' and a 'music of ideas,' a celebration of wholeness and harmony, something akin to the hermetic 'chymical wedding,' the impossible (from where we currently sit) resolution of the conflicts and contradictions, the tragedies, truncations and tribulations of the world we know beneath the skies of our time.

Thus I conclude, on a highly speculative note, a discussion of some reasonably well recognised cultural phenomena: the medieval courtly idealisation of the feminine and the elevation, during the same period, of the Virgin Mary to a new eminence of Christian devotion. As I have suggested throughout this discussion, I suspect they sit on the shoulder of a mountain far larger than any of us has recognised, its roots unfathomably deep and its summit beyond all reckoning above us in the sun.

About the Author

Robert DiNapoli has taught medieval English literatures in North America, England and Australia. He has published essays in *PN Review*, *Arena Quarterly*, *Eureka Street*, *Medieval Studies*, and *Neophilologus*, and books on *Beowulf* (*A Far Light*, Cambridge Scholars Press 2016) and Old English wisdom poetry (*Reading Old English Wisdom*, Cambridge Scholars Press, 2021). His two books of poetry, *Engelboc* (2019) and *The Gnostic Hotel* (2021) have been published by Littlefox Press in Kyneton, Victoria.

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Review:

David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (Signal / Penguin Random House, 2021)

HEIDE GOETTNER-ABENDROTH, PhD

Translation by Simone Plaza and Tracy Byrne

A great title and a great book; the entire history of humankind in a single volume! This arouses curiosity, especially since the two authors are experts in their respective fields: Graeber is an anthropologist and Wengrow an archaeologist. Hence the praise in the general press was not long in coming. Nevertheless, this book also deserves a critical appraisal.

What is valuable about this book is not only the expertise of the two authors, who have incorporated the latest archaeological findings, but also that they fundamentally show that egalitarian societies make up the vast majority of human history and not infrequently re- established themselves by breaking away from societies based on domination. The authors therefore contradict the view that egalitarian societies and democracies are rare exceptions in a history characterised by kingdoms, empires and repressive states. They refute the view that domination has always existed everywhere and forms part of 'human nature,' so to speak. This view of an endless history written by the victors is overturned by their work and that's a good thing! For if domination from the top down had always existed, it would make no sense to rise up against it - something which is in the interest of

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those representing the history of the victors.

According to this ‘history of victors’ belief, Indigenous peoples and women as a whole fall by the wayside. It is therefore fascinating to read how the authors reverse this view and place the wisdom of Indigenous peoples at the centre, using the example of Iroquois political criticism of the white Europeans, whose society was characterised by egotism, competition and private ownership, lack of individual freedom and arbitrary violence. The authors also emphasise how much the egalitarian constitution of the League of the Five Nations, or the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, influenced the constitution of America's Founding Fathers and later the French Revolution, a fact that is all too readily denied by white Americans and Europeans. Equally revealing is the description by the two authors of how criticism by Indigenous people was answered and counteracted by the European elite. They were degraded to the status of ‘noble savages’ and theories of the unilineal development of history (stage theories) were invented in which, for instance, the inferior stage of ‘barbarism’ was attributed to their social order while only the Western social order had risen to the level of ‘civilisation.’ These stage theories of history were the intellectual ideology used in colonial times to justify the conquest of other peoples and the destruction of their cultures, with noticeable repercussions to this day. With their decisive inclusion of the Indigenous perspective, the authors critically question this Euro-American history of victors and expose its unenlightened arrogance.

But what about the inclusion of women's perspectives? They are generally also victims of the history of victors because they simply do not exist in it. Although they are far from a marginal group, making up half of humanity, in this ‘new history of humanity’ women only sporadically appear and then in an unrelated context. However, at least they do appear, something which distinguishes this new history from other histories written by males. But their significance is not grasped, as if they had not achieved anything throughout the millennia of human history that would have been worthy of detailed mention and, above all, systematic inclusion. This new history is strangely incomplete when it comes to the activities and inventions of women and their shaping of social orders. Yet it is precisely the situation of women, their freedom or lack of freedom, that reflects the state of a society as a whole. This significance of women in the history of humanity is one of the burning questions we want to explore.

The other burning question is: where does humankind’s striving for equality and happiness come from? By ‘equality’ here I don't mean egalitarianism or formal equality but an understanding that each individual has the same value in spite of the countless differences between people. When each and every individual has the same value, they are given personal dignity and freedom of choice in acting together with others. This aspiration is deeply rooted in human beings but what is its origin? We learn nothing

about this in this book, only that the notion of an original state of equality in human history is rejected as a relic of the old stage theories. Yet the question remains: why do humans strive so intensely for happiness and equality, and how have they managed to live egalitarian lives in such long and different periods of history? This seems contradictory, and it has to do with the fact that the fundamental importance of women and mothers does not feature in this work. Consequently, despite the authors' honest attempt at balance, the work remains male-oriented and, therefore, limited.

For the fundamental importance of women and mothers in the humanisation of *Homo sapiens*, we will only briefly refer to the work of Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (*Mothers and Others)*, who has shown that it's precisely the care, attention, and capacity for empathy of mothers that distinguishes the human species from the animal world. This ability was passed on to the whole community as other women and also men adopted this original maternal attitude and empathy with other people and beings and it became a characteristic trait of the human species. Human infants in Indigenous societies grew up, and continue to grow up today, in an environment of universal care and empathy that makes them aware of their personal value, no matter how different one child is from another. This means that, from the very beginning, they experience equality as equal value and derive feelings of happiness from this. Childhood is therefore the origin of this striving for happiness and equality. In human history, experiencing these states has been due to mothers and maternal values and, as is still the case today, individually with every mother who has the same attitude towards her children and their needs.
For without this, no child would grow up healthy or indeed survive at all.

This fundamental fact - that maternal behaviour and values have been extremely important for every individual and for humanity as a whole - is not seen by the authors. But they can hardly be blamed for this. Such blindness to the huge significance of motherhood, the oppression of and contempt for mothers, and the exploitation of their bodily, psychological, and social capacities are widespread in today's patriarchal Western societies. Nevertheless, mothers are quite crucial in a history of humanity. After all, in the normal mother-child relationship we have found the origin of humans striving for happiness and equality, the latter in the sense of all individuals having the same value. Moreover, these abstract concepts become tangible because they are filled to the brim with sensory perceptions as a result of the experiences of childhood.

When a whole community adopts the maternal attitude of care and empathy, as was evidently the case in the evolutionary process of becoming human, this also signifies a certain social order that arises from the bodily, psychological, and social capacities of mothers. Such an order is based on the aforementioned maternal values, to which are added the associated values of mutual help and peacekeeping, for without these a child

will not grow up to become an adult. In this way, a social and cultural model was consciously created from a biological fact, motherhood, which is an extraordinary spiritual achievement of early humanity, especially of mothers. In modern Matriarchal Studies, this social order is called ‘matriarchy,’ which has nothing to do with the domination by women but rather has something profoundly to do with happiness and equality. It's therefore no coincidence that the few matriarchal societies that still exist today show precisely these values and this insistence on equality (see Heide Goettner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies. Studies on Indigenous Cultures across the Globe*, New York, 2013).

However, I am not immediately claiming that, in the Palaeolithic, humans lived exclusively in this happy state as hunter-gatherers and that matriarchy was the general primal state. Graeber and Wengrow use anthropological examples to demonstrate in detail the great diversity of hunter-gatherer societies and conclude that, in this long early epoch, people were not limited to small egalitarian groups but undertook many social experiments that produced a variety of political forms.

This is extremely interesting, but two points are irritating. Firstly, this shows the diverse nature of *today's* hunter-gatherer societies which (as is usual in anthropology) are strung together as if they had no history and then projected back to the Palaeolithic as a hypothesis. Secondly, not a single matrilineal hunter-gatherer society appears in this presentation, as if they were completely unimportant. Yet they frequently exist and would lead to quite different conclusions. Instead we read of the more warlike Yanomami and the Tupi chiefs who practise polygyny, both societies in South America. We also hear of other peoples on the Northwest Coast of North America, where the economy is in the hands of the chiefs, leading to lavish feasts for prestige and dominance as well as the keeping of slaves. We also hear about the industrious but greedy hunter-gatherers in California who are bent on accumulating their money. Also presented are the Nuer in Africa, where women's freedom ends with marriage because they are acquired by means of a bride wealth system, meaning that equality only applies to men. All this sounds very familiar to us and is hardly matriarchal. So, is this selection - which is supposed to reflect the political forms of society in the Palaeolithic - surprising? There is also talk of flexible, seasonal forms of society, the building up and then dismantling of hierarchies, whereby we might ask: what is meant by hierarchy here? If such a form can be built up and soon dismantled again, it's not a hierarchy but rather indicates sporadic leadership that comes and goes depending on changing conditions and doesn't represent a change between different forms of society. There is also evidence of this form of sporadic leadership in egalitarian matriarchal societies, indicating its relative insignificance for society.

But why are the well-known hunter-gatherer societies with a mother line left out? Such societies include the San (!Kung), Hadza, and Mbuti Pygmies, who practise true equality,

which is to say, also between the sexes. I don't want discuss here how far the mother line has actually developed among them but would point out that they are missing in the colourful variety of anthropological examples in Graeber and Wengrow's book. Nor does it seem to have been understood what the mother line, when fully developed, actually means in terms of the organisation of a society. It corresponds to the humanisation of *Homo sapiens* and clearly points to the earliest, mother-centred social forms which later developed into agrarian matriarchal societies.

This is not to say that these matrilineal hunter-gatherer societies represent the general primal state in the Palaeolithic. However, one thing does stand out: the people mentioned still live where their ancestors lived, namely in southern and tropical Africa. Even though they have been pushed back into the jungle and the semi-desert Kalahari throughout their long history, they have nevertheless remained there, in Africa, where *Homo sapiens*, i.e. the first modern humans, originated and then spread out into the whole world. They are also considered to be the oldest peoples in the world because of the peculiarities of their language.

All the other hunter-gatherer societies listed by the two authors have long since ceased to live where the first modern humans came from. This is significant because over the millennia their ancestors started out from Africa, migrated long distances across continents and seas with corresponding dangers and difficulties and, as a result, have a completely different history from the San and the Pygmies. But these peoples are strung together in their present form like a colourful 'carnival procession' (Graeber and Wengrow) as if the history of their long migrations did not exist. Yet their turbulent history may have altered them a great deal and produced male-dominant political forms that no longer correspond to their own early social forms. These changes even reach into the present.

One example of such a change towards male dominance from a previously egalitarian state is represented by the long and dangerous migrations across the ocean as reflected in the pre-Polynesian and later Polynesian settlement of the Pacific (for further elaboration on this example, see Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchal Societies*). Consequently, all the hunter-gatherer societies outside Africa cited by Graeber and Wengrow have each had their own, sometimes dramatic, history that changed them in particular ways. Even if it is methodologically difficult to find out their history in each case, this is nevertheless a fact that must be included, at least hypothetically. Aside from their biased selection, it's therefore not plausible that the examples given by Graeber and Wengrow should all indiscriminately represent social and political forms in the Palaeolithic just because they are hunter-gatherers. Rather it is a backward projection from their present state into the Palaeolithic.

So much for my comments on the hypotheses of the two authors regarding the Palaeolithic. What about their hypotheses for the Neolithic? Here, there are many points of agreement with modern Matriarchal Studies. Firstly, that this new form of economy was an invention by women which had far-reaching social consequences, a topic the two authors do not pursue further, however. Secondly, based on the grounds that evidence is lacking, they reject the view that private ownership arose with agriculture and, as a consequence, inequality, elites, domination, and war, with which modern Matriarchal Studies fully agrees. Like Graeber and Wengrow, in accordance with recent archaeological findings, we acknowledge that Neolithic agrarian societies were free from hierarchies and elites. Instead, the people created complex self- governments from below; this self-government extended to the large Neolithic and Bronze Age cities with matriarchal characteristics and endured until the Minoan culture of Crete. Like Graeber and Wengrow, in modern Matriarchal Studies we don't equate the size of cities and the higher complexity of societies with hierarchy. In other words, there is no need for elites, rulers, or other potentates who would now 'plan' cities and exploit society (see Marija Gimbutas on the Danubian cultures in *The Civilization of the Goddess*). The correlation of size and complexity with hierarchy is a constant topic for many archaeologists but there is no evidence for this and it is a relief to see this old mental block finally being breached.

It also comes as a pleasant surprise that Graeber and Wengrow, supported by the research of Marija Gimbutas, don't reject the possibility of matriarchies in the European Neolithic but consider them to be real. This presupposes a new, adequate definition of matriarchy beyond the old prejudices. Gimbutas doesn't provide this definition explicitly but circumscribes its characteristics under the term *matristic*. From her, the two authors produce a new idea of matriarchy but, unfortunately, as yet they don't have any knowledge of modern Matriarchal Studies, in which this definition is much more developed. This is also the reason why they see the scope of matriarchies so narrowly, since Gimbutas didn't research them beyond Old Europe. However, my analyses of some surviving societies of this type in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, which are among the oldest Indigenous peoples in the areas where they live, show that matriarchies existed and still exist on all these continents and that they have a long history there. This broadens the view considerably and gives rise to a number of new issues for further research.

As an aside, it should be noted that Graeber and Wengrow's new history focuses on political forms. However, the realms of worldview and religion are completely missing, although these are extremely important in the various forms of mother-centred and matriarchal societies.

The whole topic of egalitarian societies in history needs further research. Matriarchies have so far been excluded from general research into egalitarian societies because of the prejudiced idea of the domination by women. Yet modern Matriarchal Studies has shown that these societies are fundamentally egalitarian, especially with regard to gender, because of the validity of maternal values, the core of which is equal value, both in personal and social terms. The same is not always true for other so-called egalitarian societies when equality applies only among men. Should this link between true equality of both sexes and matriarchy finally be understood, then we will see not only rare and disparate examples in societies that were and are strongly influenced by women, but we will also achieve a picture with far greater consistency with reality. This would have numerous consequences because it would reveal the significance of early matriarchal societies for later social orders, which are still strongly influenced by them despite conquest and appropriation. This is especially true of the classical matriarchy of the five tribes of the League of Five Nations, whose constitution (as Graeber and Wengrow have pointed out) provided lasting inspiration for the emergence of early American democracy and subsequent European democracies.

In saying this, we are not reintroducing the Victorian hypothesis of matriarchy as a primordial state, for this was nothing more than romantic speculation. Instead, we are relying on the more recent archaeological finds combined with detailed knowledge of the structure and functioning of living matriarchal societies provided by modern Matriarchal Studies. This results in a completely new perspective on history and in exciting new possibilities for interpretation, this time not seen through a one-sided patriarchal lens but seen from two sides and clearly. Only then will we get a complete history of humankind that does not either exclude the other half or treat it only marginally (see Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchal Societies of the Past and the Rise of Patriarchy. West Asia and Europe*, New York, 2022)

Finally, the question remains as to how we got stuck where we are now (as the two authors put it), that is, stuck in patriarchy with its multiple forms of violence and oppression such as class, race, caste, private ownership, enslavement of women, war, and genocide. Graeber and Wengrow's response is that this arose from the combination of care and oppression found in the patriarchal household towards women and uprooted individuals which was later extended to social institutions. Such an answer, however, is highly unsatisfactory. Surely, we need an explanation as to how the patriarchal household came about, perhaps by creeping up from below? The fact that the patriarchal household is a result rather than a cause of this social upheaval remains entirely obscure.

Ultimately, it is a question of explaining in general how forms of domination arose because stable matriarchal societies that had existed for thousands of years could only

come under pressure and be changed through this. According to our research, this process was triggered by entire peoples who were uprooted by large-scale, long-term climatic changes and literally had the ground taken from under their feet. This prevented them from returning to their old ways of life, which is why they perished or survived thanks to new inventions. Survival strategies emerged that gave rise to the charismatic leader as the 'saviour in need.' He was now voluntarily granted certain privileges, which in turn allowed him to develop new, egocentric political forms. Under ecologically extreme circumstances that lasted for millennia, the position of this charismatic leader was consolidated, which gradually led, step by step, to the formation of male alliances and male hierarchies with all the consequential effects on private households and society as a whole. It also led to the irreversible process of land grabbing for survival, with the consequent emergence of systematic conquest and subjugation. In other words, this millennia-long upheaval involved far more people, namely entire societies, and was geographically far more extensive than the mere emergence of patriarchal households (see Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchal Societies of the Past and the Rise of Patriarchy)*.

In conclusion, I would like to say that a dialogue would be desirable between the exciting research approach of Graeber and Wengrow and modern Matriarchal Studies, firstly because of their similarities and, secondly, in order to truly set the dynamics of a new, more hopeful history of humanity in motion. In such a history, both sexes and their achievements would have equal value, and both could work equally as male and female researchers on its further development.

Heide Goettner-Abendroth
January 2023

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Matrix: a Journal for Matricultural Studies

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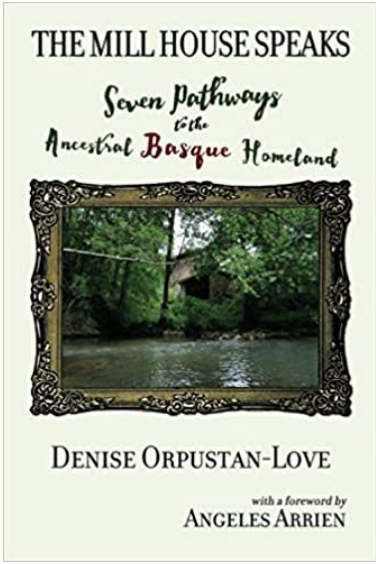
ANNOUNCEMENT: BOOK RELEASE

The Millhouse Speaks:
Seven Pathways to the Ancestral Basque Homeland
Centre for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno, 2017

DENISE ORPUSTAN-LOVE



The Mill House Speaks takes the reader on a very personal and loving exploration of the Basque Country and its spiritual traditions. It explores Basque life and mysticism—"the honoring of the mystery of life, land, place, home, family, ancestors," through the author's experiences, sensations, emotions, and perceptions on a journey to Basque Country with her two children, a trip made to restore the mill house originally owned by the author's father. On this trip she explores seven pathways into the ancestral Basque homeland that, in the words of Angeles Arrien, "are both rooted and grounded in the simple, yet time-honored perennial wisdoms of ancient Basque people."

Denise Orpustan-Love, Ph.D., is a first generation Basque American and university professor who lives with her husband and children in Northern California and spends summers in the Basque Country in Southwestern France (https://deniseorpustan-love.com/). The book can be ordered online from the publisher, the Center for Basque Studies Press at the University of Nevada Reno, or on Amazon.

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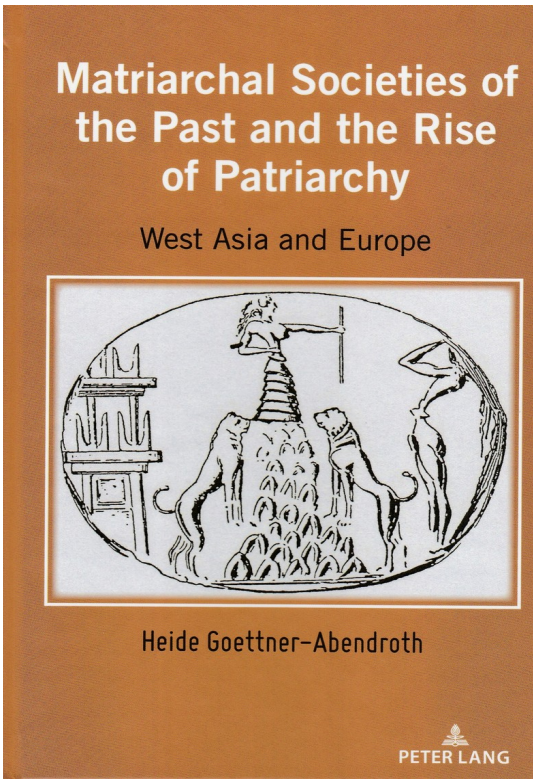
ANNOUNCEMENT: BOOK RELEASE

Matriarchal Societies of the Past and the Rise of Patriarchy in West Asia and Europe Peter Lang, New York 2022

HEIDE GOETTNER-ABENDROTH, PhD



This new book, my second major work on modern Matriarchal Studies, was published in German in 2019, and now it is published in English. In order to write this book, I relied on detailed knowledge I gained from my studies on still existing matriarchal societies, which were published in my earlier book, *Matriarchal Societies. Studies on Indigenous Cultures across the Globe* (Peter Lang, New York 2012/2013).

I wanted to get deeper insight into the history of cultures than has been given until now by archaeologists. The new book is seriously based on their old and newest findings; this is the basis to avoid speculation. But I am critical in regard to the interpretations of conventional archaeology which are very often patriarchally biased. My studies on still existing matriarchal societies

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helped me to recognize this and see many of their findings in a different light. Therefore, some clear criticism of ideology was necessary, too.

I include very interesting new evidence on the topic of egalitarian societies in early history, which were women-centered, or matriarchal, which is not well known today. Apart from this, I visited nearly all the archaeological places in West Asia and West Europe which are included in this book. My travels during three decades gave me the opportunity to see most of them with my own eyes.

Some notes on the book

Historiography tends to focus on war; it is concerned about domination, about emperors, kings and other potentates, and their expansion of power. As such, it is male history, that is, the history of the victors. Women do not form part of this history, aside from a few exceptions, which do not alter the patriarchal nature of the narrative. They and their achievements have been treated as marginal or non-existent by conventional archaeology, just as if women's practical inventions and the social and cultural patterns they created had never existed.

The aim of this book is to help redress this bias by using an integrative approach that ***rewrites and rebalances human cultural history***. This provides a new perception, seeing cultural history not only from "above" but also from "below", the only way to achieve complete understanding.

Above all, it is not simply about the early history of women, but rather the history of a very different form of society, ***matriarchal society,*** with its social, economic and political institutions, and its different world view. This form of society was shaped by women and supported by maternal values, such as respect for diversity combined with general equality, making it fundamentally ***egalitarian.*** This kind of society is revealed in early history by thorough research based on archaeological findings.

The emergence of patriarchal patterns is also explained in my new book, not through theoretical speculation, but again based on archaeological findings. The origins and development of patriarchy differ widely in the various cultural zones of the world, so there is no simple, universal explanatory pattern. This book looks at the emergence of patriarchal patterns in the major cultural areas of West Asia and Europe, and also the conditions for their subsequent expansion.

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